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The German Freikorps 1918–23

Carlos Caballero Jurado • Illustrated by Ramiro Bujeiro

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Abbreviations

The acronyms and abbreviations found most often in this text are:

FK	*Freikorps,* Free Corps
Freiw.	*Freiwillige/n,* volunteer
KPD	German Communist Party
POW	Polish Military Organization
SPD	German Socialist Party
USPD	Independent German Socialist Party

German unit titles

The word 'volunteer', frequently encountered in the titles of the various Freikorps, differs in spelling depending upon the gender of the associated noun: e.g. Freiwilligen Bataillon, Korps or Regiment (neuter), but Freiwillige Abteilung, Brigade or Division (feminine). As for hyphenation: consistency and accuracy to a particular period are hard to reconcile, so we have omitted all hyphens from composite unit titles.

THE GERMAN FREIKORPS 1918–23

1918: THE EMPIRES CRUMBLE

WHEN THE FIRST WORLD WAR began in the summer of 1914, great demonstrations of popular enthusiasm broke out in all major European cities. The governments of all the combatant powers received almost unanimous support from their parliaments for what was generally expected to be a short and glorious war. What followed proved to be an unprecedented ordeal, as for the first time in history mass conscription took a whole generation of European manhood and fed them into an unimaginably horrible industrialised slaughterhouse. Hundreds of thousands of men fell in each of a series of bloody, months-long battles, which followed one another relentlessly, year after year, seemingly with no end in sight.

For four years the front-line fighting men lived in a sort of hell; but on the 'home front', too, the uncomprehending civil populations also suffered increasing misery as shortages gripped, leading in many countries to real hunger. The initial patriotic joy turned first into baffled disbelief, then into despair and rage. The political leaders who opposed the war – a small and generally derided minority in 1914 – began to win more and more popular support. Every day increasingly bitter criticism was voiced against the military and political leadership which seemed unable to end the conflict.

A representative recruiting poster, in this case for the Freikorps Hülsen – 'Reichswehr Brig.3 – Registration offices: Friedberg.Hessen.Schloss'. (Von Oven)

Russia was the first country where this unrest broke out into actual revolution. The patriotic fervour stirred by the outbreak of war had only masked already dangerous pressures, and the three-year ordeal which followed finally exposed the chronic failings of the Tsarist state. In February 1917 the Tsar was removed from power by a moderate reformist regime headed by Kerensky, which attempted to continue the war; but the Russian revolutionary process only ended that October, when V. I. Lenin's Bolshevik (Communist) party took power in a coup d'etat. The example of revolutionary Russia would have a great impact in all European countries.

For the Marxist Lenin, and for his imitators all over Europe, mankind's history was simply a succession of episodes in the struggle between the

Men of the Volksmarine Division with an armoured car, in the Berlin barracks which they occupied, December 1918. All have removed the national insignia from their caps. A mixture of naval and military uniforms are worn by this group; and note the sailor (centre) armed with a cutlass – cf. Plate A3. (Von Oven)

classes. Following Marxist theory, the First World War was an irrelevant contest between rival capitalist powers whose consequent weakening offered the long-awaited opportunity for a radical transformation of society. The rights of the proletariate could be secured only through a civil war between the social classes, in which the 'inevitable' victory of the workers would lead to the establishment of a 'dictatorship of the proletariate', and the eventual withering away of the coercive powers of the state. In Russia the seizure of power by Lenin's Bolsheviks was followed immediately by a long, cruel and devastating civil war[1]. Similar upheavals occurred in some other European countries; although never matching the horror or intensity of the Russian experience, some of these were still dramatic.

In some countries the Bolshevik-inspired extreme left wing parties attempted to seize power by violent revolutionary means. As a consequence, the end of the Great War did not silence the guns; on the contrary, the Armistice only heralded the beginning of a number of more or less intense internal struggles. While these broke out in several of the defeated countries, some of the winners (e.g. Italy) endured similar episodes. The most perfect example of such low intensity civil wars, however, is that which was to plague Germany. Simultaneously with these internal conflicts, the drawing of new national frontiers after the collapse of the Central Powers in 1918 caused a number of international border wars. The rebirth of Poland as an independent state and the consequent conflict with Germany provides a typical examplar of these territorial disputes.

This text deals with the Freikorps movement, which represented one of the most important factions to fight in Germany's low intensity civil war, and also shouldered the defence of the national borders, mainly against the Poles.

THE GERMAN REVOLUTION

In November 1918, when the German Imperial government concluded an armistice with the Allies, many German soldiers did not have the feeling of having been defeated. At that moment, while steadily retreating in the face of a massive Allied offensive, German armies were still on French and Belgian soil, and also controlled a good portion of

1 See MAA 293, *The Russian Civil War: The Red Army,* and MAA 305, *The Russian Civil War: The White Armies*

the old Tsarist empire and the Balkans. Nevertheless, the German High Command were conscious that after the failure of their offensive in France in spring 1918 a military victory was impossible. The failure of the German leaders to achieve a victory that could justify to their people the crippling costs of the war opened the way for the revolution that brought down the Second Reich.

Since 1916 there had existed in Germany an extreme-left political group named the Spartakusbund ('Spartacus League'), which pressed for an immediate end to the war, and pursued a Communist revolutionary programme. This movement was hugely encouraged by the triumph of the February 1917 revolution in Russia; from April that year large scale strikes developed in Germany, and that summer a mutiny broke out in the German High Seas Fleet, while parliament also demanded an end to hostilities.

The German Socialist Party (Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands, or SPD) remained loyal to the government and continued to support the military effort; but in April 1917 a large element of the SPD split off to form the Independent German Socialist Party (USPD). The new party adopted a more extreme platform, demanding not only peace but also major social and political reforms.

In spite of the growing unrest at home, the German High Command under Ludendorff continued to conduct major military operations. However, in September 1918 the other members of the Central Powers (Turkey, Bulgaria and the Austro-Hungarian Empire) began to explore the possibilities of an armistice with the Entente powers; and it became clear that Germany had no option but to follow suit. With the aim of getting the best conditions for an armistice the German High Seas Fleet – largely shut up in its harbours for the past two years – was ordered to sail, to demonstrate the Reich's continuing military power.

On 28 October 1918 the German warship crews in Kiel, instead of sailing from their base, mutinied and raised the red flag on their ships. The mutiny quickly spread to other German ports such as Lübeck, Hamburg and Bremen. The ships' officers were overpowered and in some cases murdered; and the ratings set up 'Workers' and Sailors' Councils' (*Räte* in German), on the model of the Russian 'Soviets'. The mutinous sailors formed the Volksmarine Division ('People's Naval Division'), and immediately sent detachments all over Germany – and especially to Berlin – in order to spread the revolution.

Once the German public learned that the government was seeking an armistice, revolutionary unrest spread all over the Reich. Soldiers refused to fire on the mobs which stormed their barracks to raise the red flag over them. All over the country Workers' and Soldiers' Councils were set up. The SPD, which had formed part of the government since September, attempted to help stop the revolutionary wave. One of its leaders, Gustav Noske, who had been appointed governor of Kiel, partially succeeded in restoring calm in that city, but it was far too late to confine the revolutionary movement. On 8 November Bavaria's

Offizierstellvertreter Suppe, an NCO/officer candidate of 2.Garde Regiment, was the creator of the very first Freikorps unit as early as 21 November 1918 – a 1,500-strong battalion of NCOs.

Early January 1919: Oberst Wilhelm Reinhard, from 4.Garde Regiment (centre, leaning on gate), receives reports of the fighting in Berlin-Moabit. Note the white armbands (see Plate A1).

reigning Wittelsbach dynasty was removed from power in Munich. The next day Wilhelm II, Emperor of Germany and King of Prussia, abdicated his throne. All Germany's other petty rulers were also deposed.

Understanding that the revolution was impossible to stop, the SPD joined it. On 9 November an SPD leader, Scheidemann, proclaimed the German Republic. But at the same time the Spartacist leader Carl Liebknecht declared the birth of the German Socialist Republic – two rival political projects were about to clash. For the SPD, the Kaiser's abdication marked the successful end of the revolution; for the Spartacists and the USPD the abdication was only that revolution's first step.

THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

The SPD, the main force on the German left, had no intention of seeing their country follow Russia's path, where the Tsar's fall led not to the birth of a democracy but to a Communist dictatorship imposed by force. In order to form the first Provisional Government of the German Republic the SPD agreed to join forces with the USPD; at the same time the SPD leader Friedrich Ebert agreed with Gen.Groener, the deputy chief-of-staff who had replaced Ludendorff, that the Army would support the new government, since it was in both their interests to prevent a Communist insurrection.

On 11 November 1918 the Armistice was signed and immediately the German Army began a disciplined retreat towards its national frontiers. It quickly became evident, however, that as soon as units arrived at their home stations they would dissolve: the only wish of most German soldiers was to return to their homes. For this reason, on 27 November, the German High Command ordered its subordinate commands to raise new units, formed only from volunteers of unquestionable loyalty.

At the political level, in November and December 1918 Germany in fact lived under two parallel authorities. On the one hand was the Provisional Government (whose official name, following the Russian example, was actually 'the Council of People's Commissars'). On the other were the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, of which more than 10,000 had sprung up all over Germany. Since the Provisional Government had very little actual authority, Germany's future depended on the path which this 'Councils Movement' *(Räterbewegung)* would choose to follow.

Gustav Noske, appointed Defence Minister in the SPD government, reviews men of a Marine Brigade. (Von Oven)

On 16 December 1918 the Councils' Pan-German Congress opened in Berlin. Although many radical proposals were put forward, in the end the SPD got control of the Congress by democratic means – the Spartacists were a small minority. The Congress's main resolution was a call for a National Assembly in order to draw up a constitution. The Spartacists understood that they could not achieve power by political means; so they decided to try to seize it by armed insurrection.

Since the beginning of the revolution, armed militias had been formed composed of former

soldiers – who had replaced their Imperial insignia with red cockades – and of civilians sporting red armbands; these militias called themselves Republikanische Soldatenwehren ('Republican Soldiers' Forces'). Initially their members came from the SPD and USPD, but the Spartacists soon managed to take control of the movement. In response the SPD raised a new militia, the Republikanische Schutztruppe ('Republican Defence Troops'), loyal to the Provisional Government. However, the most powerful revolutionary militia was the Volksmarine Division, whose sailors were still in Berlin. The Army High Command wished to disarm all these militias, and the Provisional Government to gain control over them. On 12 December 1918 it proposed to raise a Freiwillige Volkswehr ('Volunteer People's Force') to integrate all the militias. Although this project never materialised, it would have left the Spartacists without control of the shock troops needed to carry out a coup d'etat. They decided to act without further delay.

General Ludwig Maercker, GOC of the 214.Infanterie Division, raised the first major Freikorps formation in December 1918; a member of this Freiwilligen Landesjägerkorps is illustrated as Plate D2.

The Freikorps

Defeat and revolution had practically dissolved the German Army. Even where troops remained in their barracks the Soldiers' Councils usurped the officers' authority. (It was common for extremists to tear the rank badges and medals from the uniforms of veterans, and officers rarely dared wear uniform in public for fear of mob violence.) This military weakness coincided with revolutionary threats to German unity, and new menaces on the national borders. Both the Poles and the Czechs saw the German crisis as an opportunity to enlarge their new states at Germany's expense.

All these factors, and particularly the perceived danger of a Communist dictatorship in Germany, provoked a spontaneous reaction among many military men – officers, NCOs and soldiers alike – who were still strongly inspired by nationalist and patriotic sentiment. It was in this context that the 'Free Corps' movement was born.

A group of Spartacists manning an MG 08 heavy machine gun in the Lindenstrasse, Berlin, January 1919. Remnants of military and naval uniform can be seen along with civilian clothes.

The first of them was raised in Kiel, on Gustav Noske's orders; the SPD city mayor grouped loyal Navy officers and sailors into a unit named the Eiserne Brigade ('Iron Brigade'). But it was Gen.Maercker, commanding the 214.Infanterie Division, who created the classic model which would later be followed by most Free Corps. On 6 December Maercker decided to recruit a Free Corps among the men of his division, and orders were issued on 14 December. This all-volunteer Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps ('Volunteer Provincial Rifle Corps') was ready to serve under Provisional Government authority to oppose the revolutionary threat. Due to the prestige he enjoyed among his soldiers Gen.Maercker

successfully recruited several thousand men in a short time, although he had difficulty in fitting them all out with weapons and uniforms. In an important contrast with the old Imperial Army, the rigid disciplinary barriers which separated officers from other ranks were abolished, and Maercker emphasised a solid comradeship among all his volunteers. (Among front-line troops the separation had in fact never been as rigid as is sometimes supposed.) Another important innovation was that all units of Maercker's corps were of mixed arms. Due to the kind of combats that they faced it made no sense to maintain the traditional separation of infantry, cavalry and artillery. In the Landesjägerkorps units combined elements of all arms of service, thus avoiding the need to improvise mixed formations when entering combat.

Maercker's example was immediately followed, and during December 1918 other Free Corps were born around Berlin – e.g. the Freikorps Potsdam (Maj.von Stephani), FK Reinhard (Oberst Reinhard), Garde Kavallerie Schützen Division (Gen.von Hofmann), FK Held (Gen.von Held), FK Hülsen (Gen.von Hülsen), and the Deutsche Schutz Division (Gen.von Wissel). Most of them were formed from former regular military units. These Free Corps, together with Maercker's corps and the Eiserne Brigade (now led by Oberst von Roden), would be the forces which Gustav Noske – appointed defence minister in the SPD government on 27 December – would use in the battle for control of Berlin.

Berlin, 6 March 1919: a disabled MG 08 on the roof of the Polizeipräsidiums (Police HQ) on the Alexanderplatz after heavy fighting between the Freiw.Regt. Reinhard and the Volksmarine Division.

The Spartacist rising

In the last days of December 1918 the situation in Berlin was openly revolutionary. On the 23rd the Spartacists and the Volksmarine Division stormed the Berlin Kommandantur and encircled the Reich Chancellery. The government appealed to the Army for help, but the units which had arrived in Berlin from the front had largely vanished as soon as they reached their barracks; it was only possible to send a small party of soldiers. These succeeded in freeing the Provisional Government, but were unable to dislodge the Volksmarine Division from its quarters in the Imperial Palace, due to the opposition of a large number of demonstrators led by Spartacists. The soldiers were unwilling to fire on civilians. This episode established the uselessness of sending regular troops against the revolutionary masses; neither could the SPD militia hope to confront the Spartacists successfully. After the fighting of 23–24 December the USPD withdrew from the Provisional Government and passed to the opposition, leaving the SPD alone in government. On 30 December the Spartakusbund took the new title of Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands ('German Communist Party', KPD). To maintain its authority and public order, the SPD government would have to turn to the Free Corps.

1919: CIVIL WAR

The battle for Berlin

On 5 January 1919 the USPD and KPD called a demonstration; some 700,000 people turned out on the streets of Berlin waving red flags, and the Communists took control of the centre of the capital. In response, the next day the Provisional Government legalised the status of the already existing Free Corps, summoning volunteers to defend the law, public order and the frontiers. On 9 January the KPD instructed its followers to launch an armed insurrection.

On 10 January the eight Free Corps named above converged on the city, occupying the outer districts. Next day they stormed the city centre, expelling the Communists from the government buildings and newspaper offices which they had occupied. The fighting was severe, and machine guns, field guns and flamethrowers were employed; many barricades and buildings were taken by assault. Many of the Free Corps volunteers were former members of elite wartime units such as the Sturmtruppen assault battalions[2], and they proved more than a match for much larger but less disciplined leftist forces.

From 12 January the Free Corps units deployed all over the city, mopping up nests of Communist resistance and snipers, and searching for extremists and weapons caches. On the 15th Carl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, the two main Spartacist leaders who had called for the 'social class war', were arrested by Free Corps members and brutally murdered. In order to avoid further major violence, on 20 December the Provisional Government – well aware that many Free Corps members hated both the fledgling Republic and the Socialist Party little less than they did the Communists – ordered the Free Corps to leave Berlin.

On 19 January the German people voted for a new National Assembly, and the SPD won a convincing victory in the elections. But although it was clear that Germany did not wish to repeat the Russian experience, the Communists had enough popular support to threaten the new parliament if it convened in Berlin. It was decided that the new seat of parliament would be the city of Weimar, under the protection of Gen.Maercker's Free Corps; and it was as the Weimar Republic that the new polity would be known to history.

Berlin, March 1919: men of the Trench Mortar Detachment Heuschkel block the Wilhelmstrasse against Communist demonstrators. The placard reads 'Halt! Anyone who goes past will be shot'. The man to the left of it can just be seen to wear the M1918 helmet with ear cut-outs; the volunteer to the right wears the badge of this Freikorps on his left sleeve (see Plate H12).

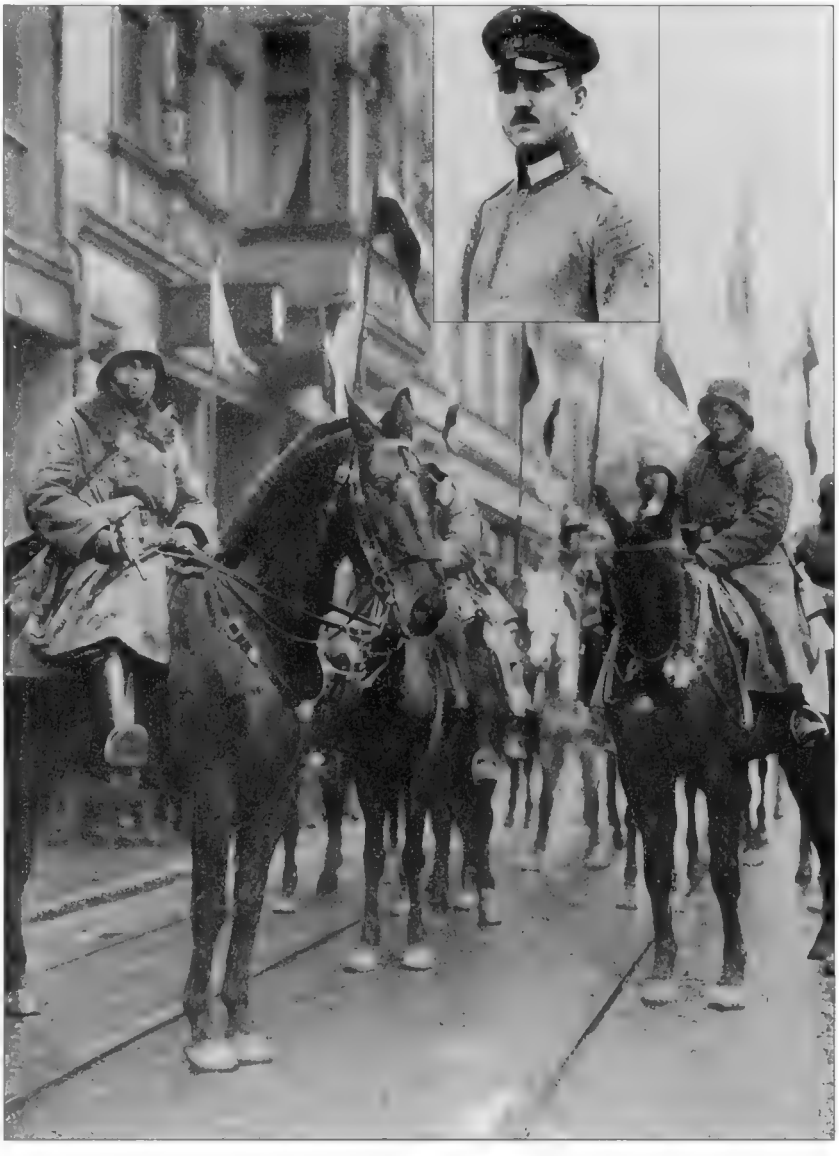
The spread of the Freikorps movement

In spring 1919 several hundred new Freikorps sprang up all over Germany, of all sizes from a single company up to a full division with artillery, pioneers, cavalry and even air squadrons as well as infantry. Many originated in wartime regular Army

2 See MAA 80, *The German Army 1914-18*, and Warrior 12, *German Stormtrooper 1914–18*.

units, with volunteer veterans grouping themselves around trusted leaders and maintaining to some extent their old unit traditions. Some of the corps took names which clearly showed their Imperial Army origins, e.g. the Freikorps V.Armeekorps. Others were created by respected combat officers (or even NCOs) who gathered around them volunteers from different backgrounds, civilian as well as military. These leaders set up recruiting offices in any convenient place, such as cafés or private houses; and when enough men had been enrolled they began to operate. To acquire uniforms, weapons and ammunition was not difficult at a time when many military barracks were almost without garrisons.

The popularity of this movement is explained by the confused and revolutionary conditions then spreading all over Central and Eastern Europe. The Russian Red Army was advancing through the Baltic countries, threatening East Prussia. Communists had taken power in Hungary and were leading serious riots in Austria. The borders between Germany and Poland, still not officially determined, saw frequent armed clashes. Inside the Reich there were rumblings of secession in Bavaria and, to a lesser degree, in Saxony and the Rhineland. Although the Versailles Conference began on 19 January, the Allies were still maintaining their naval blockade; unemployment and hunger were widespread in German cities, offering fertile ground for the revolutionary propaganda of the KPD and USPD. With the very existence of Germany as a unified state within secure borders called into question, and with the fragile institutions of the new Republic under open threat from armed factions on the extreme left, many Germans considered that continuing to bear arms in defence of what remained of their state institutions was not only legitimate but an unavoidable patriotic duty.



The SPD triumph in the Congress and in the elections for the National Assembly, together with the Free Corps' December victory in Berlin, by no means signified that control of the country was securely in government hands. The real power was on the streets, and the government needed to

March 1919: the officer in the centre holds bundled under his arm a red flag captured during the fighting for the Königsberg garrison fortress. Note that the white armband worn by these Freikorps volunteers is sometimes a simple tied handkerchief.

OPPOSITE **Lancer squadron from the FK Lichtschlag, raised by Hauptmann Lichtschlag (inset), and operational in February 1919 in the towns of Dorsten and Bottrop north of Essen during the first confrontations with revolutionaries in the Ruhr. The squadron commander (left), wearing a sheepskin coat, holds a P 08 pistol and has a slung carbine. Several of his troopers can be seen to wear the M1918 helmet with cut-outs over the ears. The man at right foreground wears the badge of the FK Lichtschlag just above the left elbow of his greatcoat: this was a shield with a rampant horse, surrounded by an oakleaf wreath, apparently in white or silver-grey.**

regain it in the areas and cities under extreme left wing control.

North-West and Central Germany

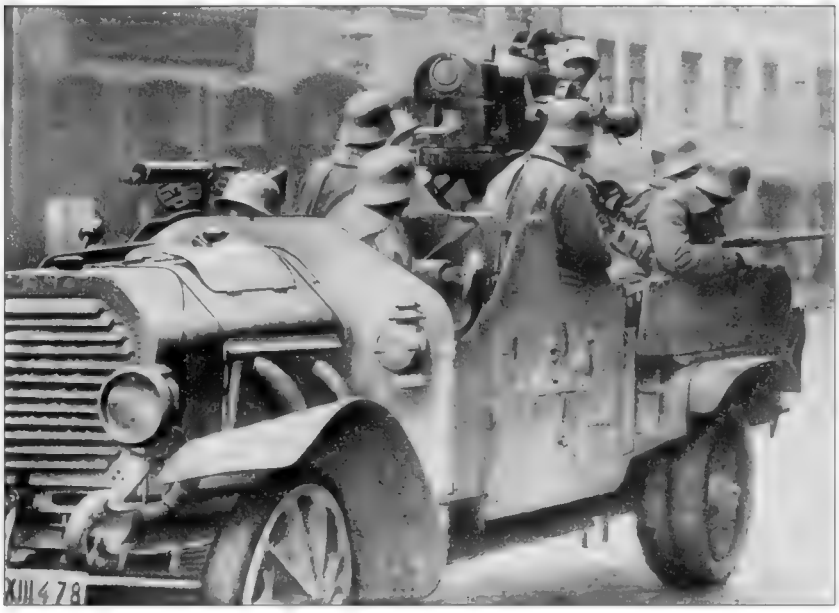
Defence Minister Noske resolved to regain control, firstly, of the north-west German ports – Bremen, Cuxhaven, Wilhelmshaven and Hamburg – which had been in Communist hands since the first days of the revolution, and which did not accept the authority of the government. For this operation he assigned a powerful Free Corps – the Freiw.Landesschützenkorps led by Gen.von Roeder – reinforced by three units formed from Navy personnel: the Eiserne Brigade, now renamed I.Marine Brigade; the II.Marine Brigade (Korvettenkapitän Ehrhardt); and the III.Marine Brigade (Korvettenkapitän von Löwenfeld).

As in Berlin, the leftists had numerically superior armed militias under their orders; but the Free Corps attack launched on 4 February against Bremen broke their resistance in hard street fighting. This provided a salutary demonstration, and after a few days all the other ports yielded to government authority.

Revolutionary unrest broke out immediately in the Ruhr, Germany's industrial and mining heartland. The KPD and USPD called a general strike and the local Soldiers' Councils supported them. The locally raised FK Lichtschlag, supported by elements of the Free Corps from the north-west coast, confronted the so-called 'Red Army of the Ruhr'. There were violent skirmishes, but an agreement was negotiated by SPD leaders in order to avoid sabotage of the mines by radical strikers, which would have caused economic catastrophe.

Now the focus shifted to the industrial cities of central Germany, several of which had proclaimed themselves as 'Autonomous Revolutionary Cities' at the end of February. Luckily for the government these rebellions were not simultaneous, and the Free Corps crushed them one by one. This campaign was led by Gen.Maercker, who employed a part of his own powerful corps (I.Brigade, Freiw. Landesjägerkorps) plus other veteran Free Corps (II.Marine Brigade – now usually referred to as the Ehrhardt Brigade – and FK Hülsen), together with more recently created units: FK Görlitz (Oberstleutnant Faupel) and FK von Oven (Gen.von Oven). Also employed at this time was an ultra-nationalist association of former front-line soldiers, the Stahlhelm ('Steel Helmet').

On 1 March 1919, Maercker's troops stormed Halle, where hard fighting brought total success. This 'Spring Campaign' under Maercker's leadership would be prolonged until mid-May; fresh fighting in Berlin and the 'invasion' of Bavaria (see below) obliged part of



Munich, early May 1919: a Krupp-Daimler Plattformwagen used as a Geschützwagen – self-propelled artillery truck. The Freikorps is unidentified, but under magnification a large white death's-head can be seen painted over the armoured louvres of the radiator.

Maercker's force to be withdrawn from Central Germany to face these new dangers.

A particular feature of this campaign was that Free Corps troops advanced into the Länder of Brunswick and Saxony in order to overthrow extreme left wing provincial governments which had taken power under the chaotic conditions which still prevailed. Both these Communist governments had made public their wish to break with the Reich and to ally themselves with Soviet Russia. This 'invasion' of two Länder which did not belong to Prussia demonstrated that neither the SPD government nor the Free Corps would allow any kind of secessionism.

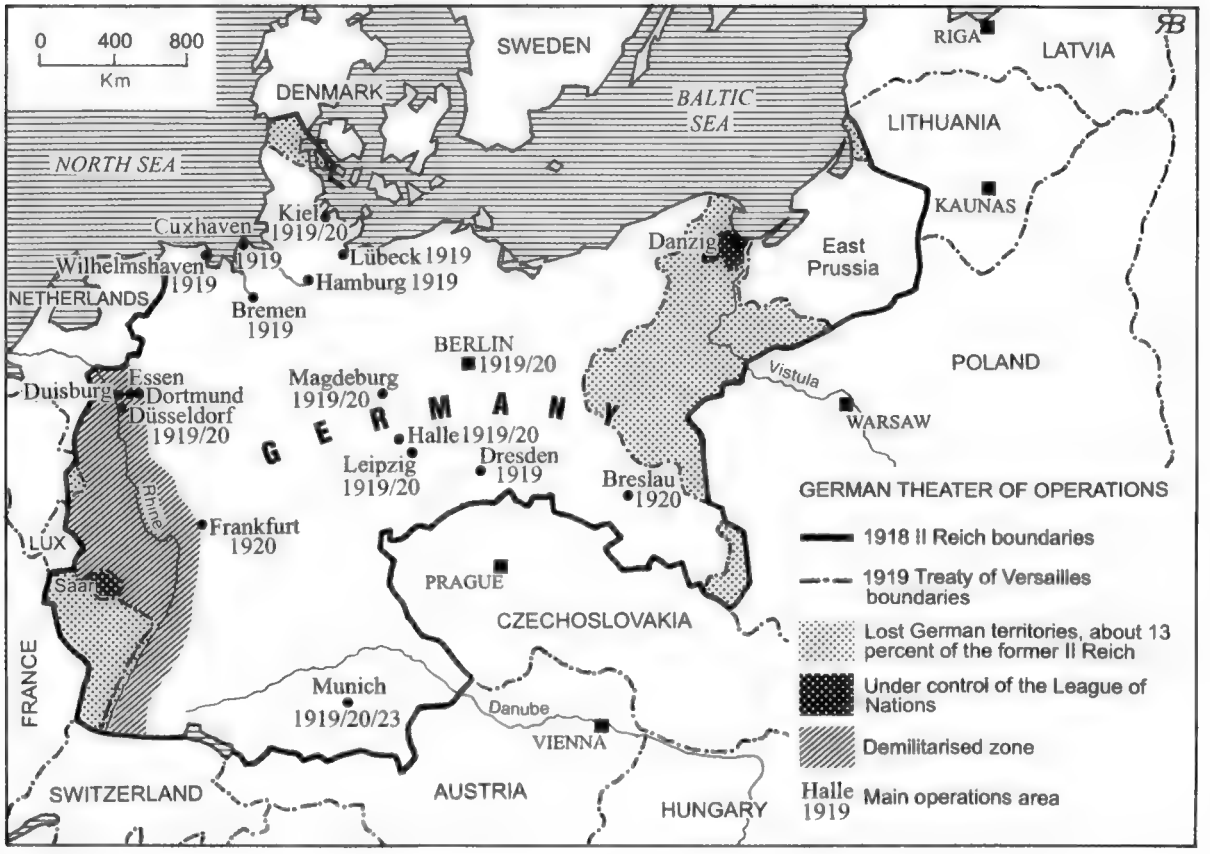
Successively the Free Corps took Magdeburg (10 April), Dresden (14 April), Brunswick (18 April), and Leipzig (11 May). After their capture Gen.Maercker raised in each city new militias, called Einwohnerwehren ('Citizen Forces'), which became a kind of 'Free Corps reserve'. The main difference between Freikorps and Einwohnerwehren was that in the first former front-line soldiers were in a majority, while in the second civilian volunteers predominated.

Berlin: the Volksmarine Division defeated

While Maercker's troops established government control of Central Germany, on 3 March the KPD and USPD in Berlin called a general strike. The government immediately declared martial law, while the revolutionaries once more took control of the city centre and the Free Corps gathered again in the suburbs. On the 5th the Volksmarine Division joined the revolutionaries. Fighting spread all over the city and lasted until 13 March. On the government side the same Free Corps were involved as had been the previous December, but now reinforced by the Ehrhardt Brigade. Heavy weapons, including tanks, were liberally used. Free Corps discipline and experience again prevailed, and after this new Free Corps victory the Volksmarine Division was finally dissolved. This episode cost about 1,500 dead and 12,000 wounded. The 'Reds' fought ruthlessly, and the Free Corps certainly responded in kind; but at least their merciless crushing of the rising avoided the spread of a national civil war, which would have been a vastly bloodier affair.

Bavaria

Bavaria is a German region with a strong historic personality, whose existence as a kingdom was older than Prussia's. Inside the Second Reich the Kingdom of Bavaria enjoyed political self-government and a wide autonomy which even included its own army; but Prussian hegemony



provoked the resentment of many Bavarians. The tragic costs of the First World War were blamed by a part of the Bavarian population on Prussian militarism.

Munich, together with Kiel, was the first focus of the German revolution. On 2 November 1918 a large crowd headed by the leftist leader Kurt Eisner had attacked Munich's military barracks, provoking the abdication of the royal family. Eisner was appointed head of the Bavarian government, and pursued a policy of open confrontation with the central government in Berlin. On 21 February 1919 an extreme right wing activist murdered Eisner, causing a violent reaction from the leftists. On 7 April the left wing extremists proclaimed the Bayerische Räterrepublik ('Bavarian Councils' Republic') – a Soviet-style republic inside Germany.

The Bavarian branch of the SPD broke its links with the Communists and organised a 'government in exile' at Bamberg, led by the Bavarian SPD leader Adolf Hoffmann. In Munich the KPD and USPD radicals, some of whom had arrived directly from Moscow, had total power. On 12 April the SPD armed militia, the Republikanische Schutztruppe, failed to dislodge the extremists. In response, the KPD/USPD government ordered the raising of a 'Bavarian Red Army' which counted 25,000 men by the end of April. The situation in Munich was chaotic – to hunger and unemployment was added a reign of terror, including the shooting of hostages.

From Berlin, Defence Minister Noske offered Hoffmann help from the Free Corps to recapture Munich; but Hoffmann rejected the offer,

(Left) Oberst Ritter von Epp, uniformed according to the regulations of the Provisional Reichswehr; note oval unit arm badge, and *Kragenspiegel*, the lace collar bars of the Guard regiments whose use was now extended to all units. He carries a small calibre pistol in a non-regulation holster.
(Centre) This Oberleutnant wears the new M1919 *Dienstmütze* cap, and the left sleeve badge of the FK von Epp (see Plate H2); note his 'naval'-style rank rings above the cuff.
(Right) A Prussian Hauptmann from the Garde Kavallerie Schützen Division displays its badge (see Plate H8) pinned to the centre of his collar patches. Compare these uniforms and insignia with details on Plate J. (Bay. Armeemuseum)

thinking that the presence of Prussian soldiers in Bavaria would be too provocative. He sent a small armed force to advance on the city, but this was defeated by the Bavarian Red Army near Dachau on 16 April. Now Hoffmann did ask Noske for help, and the minister entrusted military operations in Bavaria to Gen.Ernst von Oven.[3]

Almost 30,000 men were concentrated to surround Munich. This force included veteran shock units such as the Ehrhardt Brigade and FK Görlitz; and other new but powerful corps such as the 2.Garde Infanterie Division (Gen.von Friedeburg) and Freiwillige Abteilung Haas (Gen.Haas). Highly reputed Bavarian Free Corps would also take part: the Bayerischen Schützenkorps of Oberst Franz von Epp (better known as the FK von Epp), and the FK Oberland. The Free Corps fought many battles against Communist revolution-aries; not all can be studied in a book of this size, but the events in Munich may stand as a representative example.

On 27 April 1919 the Free Corps units crossed the Bavarian border, advancing quickly towards Munich. Large forces were assembled. Some Free Corps arrived from the neighbouring Land of Württemberg; these, reinforced by several Bavarian units, formed Gen.Haas' task force, which surrounded Munich from the west. Its order of battle included the Württemburgischer Freiwilligen Regiment Seuter and the Württ. Freiw.Regt. Graeter; and from Bavaria, Von Epp's Bayerischen Schützenkorps, the Bayer.Schützenkorps Herrgot, Bayer.Freiw.Abt. von Bogendorfer, FK Werdenfels and FK Schwaben.

North of Munich two other task forces were deployed, mainly composed of elements from Prussia. North-west of the city Gen.Friedeburg's task force included the (Preussische Freiwilligen) 2.Garde Infanterie Division, FK Görlitz and the Hessische-Thuringische-Waldekische Freikorps. To the north-east was Gen.Deetjer's force, with the Preuss.Kavallerie Schützenkorps and the Ehrhardt Brigade.

A fourth task force was deployed east of the city. Led by Gen. Siebert, it was mainly composed of Bavarian Free Corps: the Bayerische Freiwilligen Abteilung Schad, Bayer.Freiw.Abt. Heinzmann, Bayer.Freiw.Abt. Voithenleitner, Bayer.Freiw.Abt. Schaaf, and FK Oberland. The only Prussian unit in this force was the FK Lützow.

Although Free Corps from very different backgrounds took part in these operations, their co-ordination was successful. Among them some originated directly from old Army units, e.g. the two Württemberg regiments named above, which could almost be regarded as regular troops; others were 'genuine' Free Corps, raised by individuals regardless of any official initiative. Although former 'front-fighters' predominated in many units, among the Bavarian Free Corps there were many civilians. Bavaria was a conservative region, and the revolution in Munich had

3 Not to be confused with Gen.Georg von Oven, leader of his own Freikorps – they were cousins.

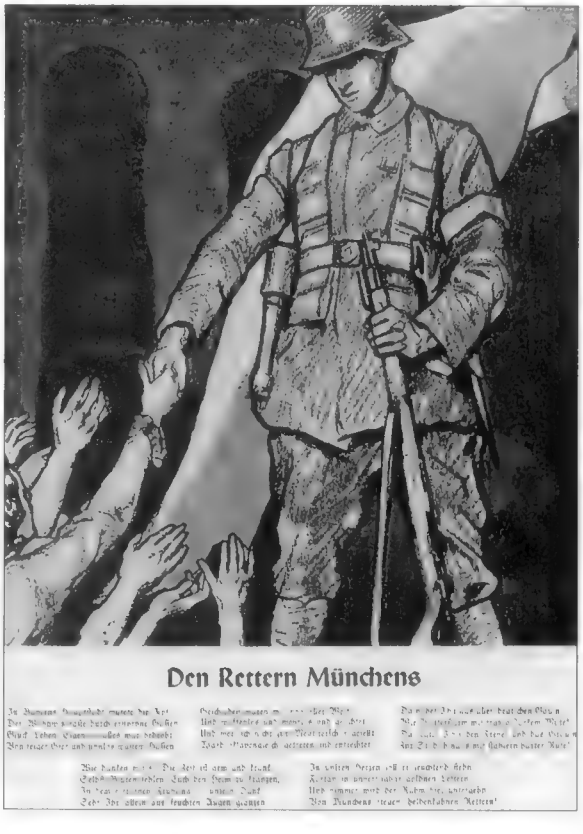
frightened the Roman Catholic middle classes and peasantry alike. Irrespective of their origins, however – old Army or new volunteers, Bavarian, Prussian or from other German provinces – all these units accepted the authority of the regular Army generals who were placed in command.

The Bavarian Red Army had at one point boasted some 60,000 men, but its numbers began to dwindle through mass desertion when its members learned of the approaching threat. From 28 to 30 April the Free Corps tightened the encirclement of Munich, capturing the neighbouring towns one by one. Inside the city KPD extremists began to murder their political opponents en masse. The Free Corps assault was planned for 2 May; but when news of these executions reached them some Free Corps – e.g. the Ehrhardt Brigade and FK Oberland – decided to anticipate it, attacking on 1 May. At the same time anti-Communists inside Munich were encouraged by the proximity of the Free Corps to rise against the Communist regime and take over some vital positions.

A Freikorpskämpfer resting placidly behind the bullet-holed window of the Ring Hotel after the battle for Munich, May 1919.

The Free Corps entered Munich from all sides in a concentrated attack. Before the assault aircraft dropped propaganda leaflets calling for surrender. Thanks to the concentration of the units and the weight of the attack victory was quickly achieved. The battle lasted two days, and although some quarters of the city were occupied without the firing of a shot, in others hard fighting was necessary; some Communist strongpoints had to be reduced with flamethrowers. The 'Red Terror' that had reigned in Munich for six months was over; it was now avenged by equally ruthless repression of the leftists at the hands of the Free Corps.

'The Saviours of Munich' – poster thanking the forces of all the German Lande which liberated Munich from the 'Red Terror'.



The Free Corps' campaign in Bavaria was not only the largest operation against German Communists; it also eradicated the worst danger of secession faced by the young Weimar Republic, since the Bavarian separatist movement was the only one with some degree of genuine popular support.

The Munich victory raised the Free Corps to a zenith of prestige. Thanks to them, Communist insurgents had been defeated in Berlin; the German northern ports had been brought under government authority; the Ruhr and Central Germany had been pacified; the secessionist threat had been crushed in Brunswick, Saxony and Bavaria; they had assured the meeting of the National Assembly in Weimar; and – as we shall see – they were the forces which were defending Germany's eastern borders. From an army that had seemed to be on the point of evaporation after the Armistice, an effective military force had been created. However, that effort to rebuild the

army would be checked by the Treaty of Versailles.

The Provisional Reichswehr

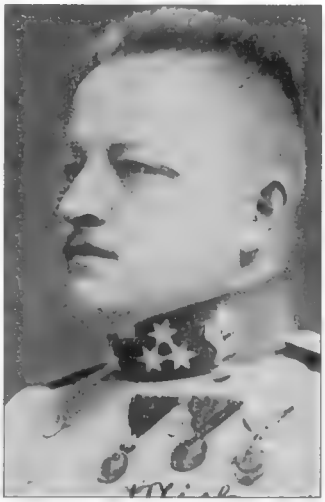
On 6 March 1919 the German National Assembly at Weimar promulgated the law that created a new German Army, the Reichswehr. (In fact this was the first truly unified German army: under the Second Reich the Imperial Army was formed by those of the kingdoms of Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony and Württemberg, each having its own War Ministry.) The territory of the German Republic was now divided into two great military commands: Gruppenkommando I (the north and east) and II (the west and south). Each was divided in turn into several Wehrkreis (military districts). The Reichswehr order of battle included 24 brigades.

The Heimwehren were the Austrian equivalents of the German Freikorps, and fought the same enemies: Communists and Slavic nationalists. Here men of the Kärntner Volkswehr Btl. St Veit Nr.8 man a machine gun position in Völkermarkt, April 1919.

Many of the Free Corps obeyed the government's instruction to become integrated into the new Reichswehr. The largest were transformed into entire brigades: FK Hülsen became the III.Reichswehr Brigade, Von Roeder's Freiw. Landesschützenkorps the IV.Brigade, Maercker's Freiw.Landesjägerkorps the XVI.Brigade, FK von Epp the XXI.Brigade, and so on. Some other corps were converted into regiments or battalions according to their size, and new units were created by amalgamating several small Free Corps. In May 1919, Noske declared that he had 400,000 men under his command; about 150,000 of these were Free Corps men, the rest belonging to surviving Imperial Army units.

On the *feldgrau* uniforms of the First World War the Free Corps displayed their own unit badges. But there were thousands of former soldiers wandering around Germany, with no money and no jobs, still wearing their old uniforms. For this reason it was resolved to provide the Reichswehr with distinctive new uniforms and insignia, while retaining the old colour (see Plate J).

The portrait below of Captain (later Major) Michner, the CO of the Kärntner Volkswehr Btl Nr.8, shows an edelweiss badge on the collar sides.



However, this Vorläufigen ('Provisional') Reichswehr was far bigger than the army which the Allies were willing to allow Germany. In January 1919 the Peace Conference had begun in Versailles, but the Germans were not called until May – and even then not to negotiate, but simply to receive the conditions. When this 'Diktat' became known it caused astonishment in Germany; political leaders were at a loss to know how to respond, and many Reichswehr generals and Free Corps chiefs preferred the risk of a new war to the acceptance of such conditions. The Treaty limited Germany to a small army of 100,000 men, with no tanks, no aircraft, no general staff, and with a tiny navy. The SPD government narrowly avoided several threatened military coups. On 28 June 1919 Germany finally signed the Versailles Treaty. The Free Corps never forgot this 'shameful surrender' by the SPD government.

BORDER WARFARE

Among the more humiliating clauses of the Treaty of Versailles were the territorial losses imposed on the *Deutschtum* ('Germandom'). Two new Slavic states, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, plus the reborn Poland, were ready to enlarge themselves at the expense of German and Austrian territories. From Styria and Carinthia, crossed by the new Austrian-Yugoslavian border, through the Sudetenland, annexed by Czechoslovakia, Silesia, Pomerania, and West and East Prussia, the Germanic and the Slavic worlds confronted one another.

The Austrian borderlands were defended by patriotic militias called Heimwehr ('Home Forces') or using similar titles – Heimatbund, Heimatschutz or Heimatwehr. The Austrian equivalents of the German Freikorps, they fought against the same enemies: Communists and Slav nationalists. The Tiroler Heimatwehr engaged the Bavarian Red Army when the latter attempted to enter Austria. The Karntner Heimatschutz in Carinthia and the Steirischer Heimatschutz in Styria fought against the Yugoslavians. While Austria's borders were protected by these Heimwehren, Germany's would be defended by the Freikorps.

Kurland, mid-1919: General der Infanterie Graf Rudiger von der Goltz (left) talking to Hauptmann von Brandis – see also page 61.

The first Eastern border campaign

On 8 November 1918 the Germans, who at that point were occupying the whole of Poland, freed the main Polish nationalist leader Josef Pilsudski. He soon created a Polish Provisional Government in Warsaw, controlling all the undoubtedly Polish-populated areas. The German Army moved out of Poland without major incidents; but Germans and Poles would soon be fighting for control of territories with mixed German/Polish populations which had belonged to the Reich before 1914. One of these territories was the Wartheland or Poznania, the area around Posen (in Polish, Poznan), where the Poles set up a Polish Supreme Council which challenged the German military auhorities in the area. The same problems arose in other border regions – East and West Prussia, and Upper Silesia.

The German High Command was not willing to hand over to Poland territories which were traditionally part of the Kingdom of Prussia. Therefore it ordered the establishment of a military command devoted to the protection of these borders, the Grenzschutz Ost ('Eastern Border Defence'), and authorised the raising of volunteer units. Many Free Corps were born of this appeal. Some were raised from regular units garrisoned in the area, such as the FK V.Armeekorps; but the most famous were those created by junior officers – like the FK Paulssen, FK von Aulock, and Sturmabteilung Rossbach, all named after the first-lieutenants who led them.

The Poles organised and armed themselves on the basis of a clandestine Polish militia, Polska Organizajca Wojskowa ('Polish Military Organization', POW). The local German inhabitants also formed militias; many of these Free Corps took the names of towns, usually German settlements surrounded by Polish rural populations, e.g. the Grenzschutz Bromberg ('Bromberg Border Defence').

Tension was rising in Poznania, and fighting broke out at the end of December 1918. At this time Berlin seemed to be on the point of falling into the hands of the Spartacists and the German Army was demoralised by mutinies and mass desertion. The German regular troops were ordered to give up the fight for Posen and retreat westwards. However, after the SPD victory over the Spartacists in Berlin the Grenzschutz Ost considered the possibility of regaining Posen, this time using Freikorps units. Two task forces were organised, to converge on Posen. Several Free Corps led by Gen.von Below would attack from the north; from Silesia in the south other Free Corps units would be led by Gen.von der Borne.

On 2 February 1919 the German offensive began with the capture of Culmsee (Chelmno) in West Prussia by the Sturmabteilung Rossbach. The offensive seemed to be going well; but a few days later the Allies instructed Berlin to halt the advance in the Posen area, in West Prussia and Upper Silesia. On 20 February the offensive was stopped and the Free Corps fell back to their departure points.

Soldier's grave in northern Kurland. Several wounded men of the Eiserne Schar Berthold were murdered by Lithuanian Bolsheviks with the hammer which is nailed to this wooden cross.

The Baltic campaign

The most surprising chapter in the Free Corps' history was their participation in the Baltic fighting of 1919. In November 1918 the German Army occupied this region. Any rapid withdrawal would create a vacuum to be exploited by the Russian Red Army – a prospect which the Western Powers did not welcome. Sending Allied troops to the area would have been very unpopular at home; but the fledgling Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian nationalist forces were unable to halt the Red Army on their own. For these reasons Germany was ordered to maintain its 8th Army in the region.

In fact the demoralised German troops were controlled by a pro-Communist Soldiers' Council; but a Freikorps was raised from among them, named the Eiserne Brigade and led by the charismatic Maj.Bischoff[4]. This was the only German military unit that attempted to halt the Red Army's advance in the Baltic countries. The other force involved was the Baltische Landeswehr raised among local German-Balts, members of the German aristocracy which had formed the landowner class in Estonia and Latvia since the time of the Teutonic Knights.

In order to free themselves of this German aristocracy a majority of the Latvian population supported the Red Army (in fact, the Latvian Rifle Regiments were among the best Red Army units). For that reason the Latvian nationalist leader Ulmanis was able to raise only a small national army, and he was forced to ask for German help in December 1918. The German government agreed, and on 1 February 1919 Gen.von der Goltz landed at Liepaja to take command of the German troops in Latvia. Von der Goltz had experience in the region, as the former leader of the

The confusingly named Hauptmann Hauptmann, commander of the Freiwilligen Bataillon Hauptmann, composed of volunteers from the German Sudetenland and Austria. The collar device appears to be a large white metal oakleaf.

4 Not to be confused with the Eiserne Brigade created by Noske in Kiel from naval personnel and later retitled I.Marine Brigade.

The holder of a famous Prussian military name: Baron Hans von Manteuffel, leader of the Stosstruppen of the Baltische Landeswehr, would fall at the head of his men on 22 May 1919 in the assault on Riga. His funeral in the captured Latvian capital had the character of a Teutonic Knights ceremony. The three stars on his collar are the rank badge of (presumably) captain; they are four-pointed, a peculiarity of this Freikorps.

ABOVE, RIGHT **May 1919: Hauptmann von Medem, chief of the Freikorps of that name, confers with his adjutant Oberleutnant Thöne shortly before the advance on Riga, May 1919. Their collar badge is illustrated as Plate H4.**

German troops which had helped Mannerheim to win Finland's war of independence in April 1918. He also had astonishingly ambitious plans. He wished to concentrate in Latvia the largest possible number of Free Corps, in order to advance on Petrograd; to crush the Soviets, establishing a pro-German government in Russia; and to turn Latvia and Estonia into German colonies, as they had been in the Middle Ages.

Provisional Reichswehr and Freikorps forces began to arrive in Latvia to reinforce both the Baltische Landswehr and the Eiserne Brigade (soon renamed Eiserne Division). To the German authorities this force was officially the VI.Reserve Armeekorps, and its mission was simply to prevent any Red Army advance towards East Prussia. Von der Goltz quickly suppressed the Soldiers' Councils in the 8th Army and restored discipline among the German regulars.

At the end of February German troops and Latvian nationalists controlled only Liepaja, the rest of the country being in Bolshevik hands. But in March Gen.von der Goltz launched his troops towards the east, up to Jelgava (south of Riga), and towards the north, to occupy Kurland (Courland). The Red Army suffered heavy defeats and fell back in some confusion. The time seemed ripe to inflict new reverses on the Bolsheviks; but relations between the German Free Corps and the Latvians were very poor, leading to confrontations in mid-April. Von der Goltz arrested the Latvian government, and Ulmanis was forced to escape in a ship of the Royal Navy's Baltic squadron.

The Western Powers demanded respect for Latvian sovereignty; but as they were not disposed to send in their own troops, and since the Berlin government was more concerned with Germany's internal upheavals, for the time being Gen. von der Goltz was able to pursue his own agenda. Against the orders of the Reichswehr High Command he launched his troops in an attack towards Riga on 25 May, quickly expelling the Red Army.

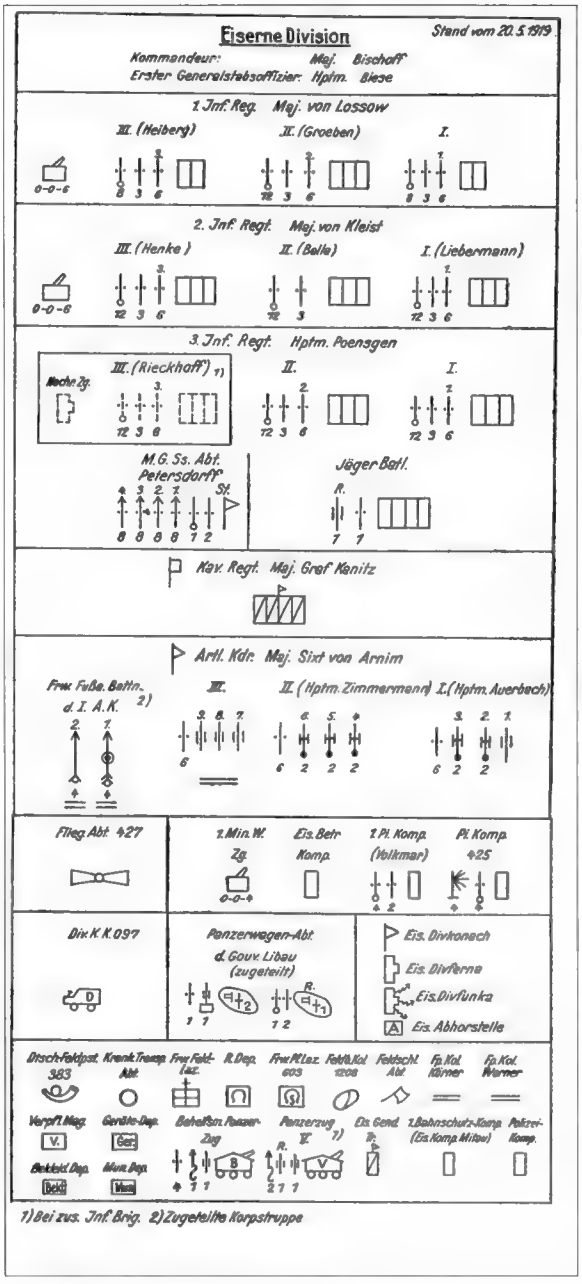
A cavalry detachment of the Baltische Landeswehr on the march towards Riga, May 1919; see Plate C2.

This news was received with enthusiasm by Freikorpskämpfer ('Free Corps fighters') in Germany: it seemed that the German Army was still fighting and still winning. There arrived in Latvia not only complete new units (e.g. FK Pfeffer, led by Hauptmann Franz Pfeffer von Salomon), but also individual volunteers from other corps. Though they were willing to fight for the government against Spartacists and secessionists at home, the Free Corps men hated the SPD for proclaiming the Republic and accepting the Armistice. For many Germans the centuries-old expansion eastwards – the Ostsiedlung ('Eastern Colonisation') or Drang nach Osten ('March to the East') was the national epic, the equivalent of the conquest of the Far West for Americans. Many dreamed of building a new Germany on the Baltic as heirs to the Teutonic Knights. They saw the *Baltenland* as a German redoubt – a country for the warriors who did not accept defeat, from where some day they would reconquer a defeated and humiliated Germany. For this reason Von der Goltz's 50,000 troops included Free Corps units from all over the Germanic world, e.g. the Bataillon Sudetenland from the German-inhabited region annexed by Czechoslovakia. Both the Western Powers and the Latvian nationalists were naturally disturbed by these wild ambitions; and in May 1919 Berlin demanded the reduction of Von der Goltz's forces by half, and an end to the recruitment of volunteers in Germany.

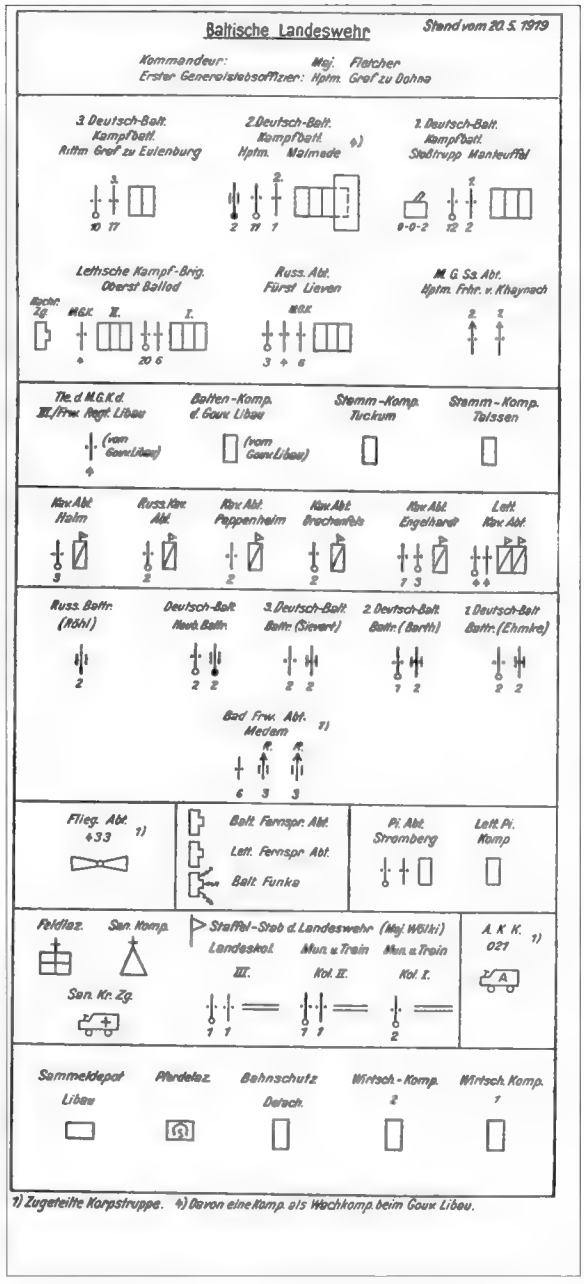
21 May 1919: a last briefing for the staff of the Baltische Landeswehr before the assault on Riga. The three officers holding the map are Hptm.von Dohna, Baron von Manteuffel, and (in fur-collared coat) the unit's commander, Major Fletcher.

After the capture of Riga the Free Corps continued to advance, but not against the Red Army: Estonia, like Latvia, had once been ruled by the Teutonic Knights... The Estonians, whose national army had already achieved some effectiveness, resisted Von der Goltz's invasion from 21 June, and this time the Free Corps were defeated. They retreated towards Riga, harassed by Estonians and Latvians. At the same time it became known that the German government had agreed to sign the Treaty of Versailles; and the British began to deliver large quantities of weapons to the Latvians to build up their national army. The Western Powers now demanded that Berlin withdraw all German troops from the Baltic before the end of August, and this order was passed to Gen.von der Goltz.

The Eiserne Division and some smaller Free Corps refused to obey. Although many volunteers did return to Germany, many others, who would not accept their government's signature of the Treaty of Versailles, decided at this moment to leave Germany and march towards the Baltic. Resolved to continue their crusade, Von der Goltz and his men offered themselves as volunteers to



1) Bei zus. Inf. Brig. 2) Zugeteilte Korpstruppe



1) Zugeteilte Korpstruppe. 4) Davon eine Komp. als Wachkomp. beim Gouv. Libau.

Tables of organisation of (left) Bischoff's 'Iron Division' in Latvia, May 1919; and (right) the Baltische Landeswehr at the same date. Both are original documents published by the Reichskriegsministerium in 1937. Note that the Landeswehr table contains units identified as 'German-Baltic', 'Latvian' (Lettische), and 'Russian'.

Col.Prince Avalov-Bermondt, who commanded the White Russian troops in Latvia. Like all Whites, Avalov hated the 'secessionist' Latvians and Estonians; moreover, throughout centuries of Russian rule in the region the German-Balts had been loyal subjects of the Tsar. Avalov-Bermondt accepted Von der Goltz and his troops into his ranks in an alliance against the Latvian and Estonian nationalists.

This oddly mixed German-Russian Army was formed during September 1919, including the Eiserne Division and the Deutsche Legion – into which latter were gathered the remaining smaller Free Corps. On 8 October this army tried once more to storm Riga, now in the hands of the Latvians. When the city was on the point of falling the

The White Russian leader Col.Prince Avalov-Bermondt, commander of the German/Russian 'Freiwillige Russische Westarmee' on the Baltic front. Its sleeve badge is illustrated as Plate H18.

Royal Navy began to shell the German forces. From the 19th onwards the Latvians took the offensive, forcing the Free Corps back towards the Lithuanian border. The Lithuanians, who up to this point had stood aside from the conflict, now joined the fight against the Free Corps.

Even at this hopeless point in Von der Goltz's fortunes he received reinforcements from Germany. The Sturmabteilung Rossbach had fought with outstanding spirit against the Poles before being integrated into the Provisional Reichswehr as 37. Jäger Bataillon. But neither Rossbach nor his men were willing to obey the government that had signed the Treaty of Versailles. The 37.Jäger Bataillon left its barracks on the German-Polish border, and after an exhausting foot march of 1,000 km they joined the Eiserne Division at the moment when they were encircled by the Latvians on 9 November 1919. It was a pointless gesture, however: by the end of November the Latvians had expelled the Free Corps from their country.

Having crossed Lithuania, the defeated volunteers finally arrived in East Prussia. Returning to a Germany crippled and humiliated at Versailles, they raged at the government which had deserted them, and the Republic which had accepted the terms imposed by the victors. For many, their only goal now was to overthrow that government and to destroy the Republic.

1920: AGAINST THE REPUBLIC

The German Republic had the support neither of the Free Corps nor of many leaders of the Reichswehr, inheritors of the traditions of the old Imperial Army. After the signing of the Treaty of Versailles right wing conspiracies blossomed. The commander of Gruppenkommando I, Gen.von Lüttwitz, planned to rise immediately with Free Corps support; but the leaders of the most important Free Corps – Gens.Maercker, Von Hülsen, Hofmann, Von Oven and Von Lettow-Vorbeck – refused, while indicating that they would be ready to revolt if the government capitulated to the extreme left or accepted Western Powers demands that would offend German military honour. Von Lüttwitz decided to seek the support of the most radical Free Corps: the Ehrhardt Brigade, and the units which were straggling home from the Baltic adventure.

The terms of the Treaty began to be applied from 1 January 1920. The Reichswehr had to be reduced from 450,000 (including the Free Corps) to 100,000 men. Its new Commander-in-Chief, Gen.von Seeckt, was no enthusiast for the Free Corps. He too rejected Versailles, and hoped that one day Germany could take revenge; to reach that goal he had no intention of putting his trust in political extremists, but in highly qualified military technicians. Von Seeckt therefore ordered the disbandment of the Free Corps.

The Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch

For his part, Von Lüttwitz decided to anticipate the disbandment order. Although he had relied for his planned coup ('Putsch') on the support of a conservative political leader, Dr Kapp, his main hope lay in the Ehrhardt Brigade. The brigade entered Berlin on the morning of

Under magnification, a number of men in this group of Germans integrated into the 'Volunteer Russian Army of the West' can be seen to wear Imperial Russian oval-shaped cockades on their cap bands, with or without German cockades on the crowns; some appear to have adopted broad Russian shoulder boards.

13 March 1920, taking possession of the government district. The Reichswehr, in obedience to Gen.von Seeckt's orders, did not confront them; Von Seeckt did not wish to see German soldiers firing upon one another. With the predictable exception of Von der Goltz, none of the rest of the Free Corps generals openly joined the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch, even if they personally agreed with its goals. The Putsch was a total failure in Berlin, and on 18 March the government returned to the capital.

One of the reasons for this failure was simply that the organisers had failed to inform the other Free Corps of the date. Some small units spontaneously joined in, but only Von Löwenfeld's III.Marine Brigade made a serious move. Quartered in Silesia in order to protect the area from Polish attacks, it took the regional capital, Breslau (Wroclaw). The major reason for the failure, however, was that the SPD government immediately called a general strike which received massive support from the German people. Obeying government orders, in some Reichswehr units the soldiers arrested officers whom they suspected of supporting the Putsch; and the sailors of the diminished Navy arrested their officers and ran up the red flag.

Despite its early failure, the Putsch had important consequences. In Bavaria, on the night of 13/14 March, Bavarian Free Corps elements overthrew the regional SPD government and handed over political power to the conservative and monarchist politician Gustav von Kahr. For Von Kahr, however, the Putsch was 'a Prussian affair' of which he wanted no part.

While the right wing took power in Bavaria, in the rest of Germany it was the extreme left which profited from a backlash against the plotters. Taking advantage of the general strike, there were Communist riots all over the country – in Halle, Kiel, Leipzig, Magdeburg, Chemnitz, Frankfurt-am-Main – which were only barely put down by the Police, the Reichswehr and some Free Corps. However, in the Ruhr area the Communist insurrection was successful. Although Germany was making its painful way towards some sort of political stability, central authority was still weak and depended upon whoever could dominate the streets. Ordering the Reichswehr to fire upon their fellow countrymen was a risk to be avoided if at all possible. To oppose the Red militias the government had only one really effective force at their disposal: the Freikorps.

The Red Army of the Ruhr

In the country's main mining and industrial region the Free Corps campaign in the spring of 1919 had ended with only a partial victory, for reasons discussed above. In this heartland of the workers' revolutionary

movement both the KPD and USPD were powerful, and many SPD members felt closer to these groups than to the moderate SPD leadership in Berlin. Moreover, the Ruhr was in the Demilitarised Zone which the Treaty of Versailles had imposed on Germany. Though the Reichswehr's withdrawal from the area was not complete its local forces were too weak to stop the rising.

Armed clashes between the revolutionaries and Police and Reichswehr units began on 15 March 1920; some small local Free Corps were also involved. Victory was soon claimed by the insurgent 'Red Army of the Ruhr', which occupied important cities such as Dortmund and Essen. The Communists were well organised and obeyed a unified command structure. In a short time they raised some 50,000 men, equipped with all kinds of weapons including artillery (the Ruhr was the site of most of Germany's armament industry). In order to avoid new defeats the Police, the Reichswehr and the Free Corps left other cities such as Düsseldorf and Duisburg in the insurgents' hands. Greatly encouraged by these events, by the success of the workers' general strike in thwarting the Putsch, and by news of simultaneous riots in Thuringia and Saxony, the revolutionaries boasted that their rising was surpassed in historical importance only by Lenin's coup in Petrograd.

On 24 March an SPD leader negotiated a truce between the Ruhr Red Army on the one side, and the Reichswehr and Free Corps on the other; but in fact both sides used the pause to build up their strength. The SPD government found itself in a critical position. Although it had been menaced by the Free Corps in the recent Putsch, once again it was forced to rely on them – including some units which it would have liked to disband immediately – because the Free Corps were the only force capable of confronting the Ruhr Red Army.

The Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch: on the grey morning of 13 March 1920 the Sturmkompanie of Ehrhardt's II.Marine Brigade follow the Reichskriegsflagge through the empty streets of Berlin. The first three men have grenade bags slung under their arms; in the second rank, wearing a greatcoat and with a slung MP 18, is the company commander, Kapitänleutnant Manfred von Killinger.
Cf Plates D1 & D3.

The commander of Wehrkreis VI, Gen.von Watter, concentrated all available Free Corps in three task forces. In the north the Wesel Division was built around Von Löwenfeld's III.Marine Brigade, with other units such as the FK Düsseldorf, FK von Aulock and Sturmabteilung Rossbach. In the centre was deployed the Münster Division, including the FK Hindenburg, FK Göttingen, FK Gabcke, Freiw.Abt. Haas, FK Severin, and others. In the south the Von Epp Division comprised the FK von Epp, FK Oberland and FK von Oven, among other units. The Red Army of the Ruhr had also been strengthened, and now claimed some 80,000 men.

On 3 April 1920 the precarious truce was broken and the Free Corps launched a general attack, advancing with extraordinary violence. As many times before, the Free Corps were able to defeat forces far superior in numbers by dint of combat experience and a resolutely offensive spirit. And as before – indeed, as in all civil wars – both sides employed the harshest methods against their enemies. This episode was the

The Ehrhardt Brigade deploys in the Wilhelmplatz and the government quarter. At left, note the soldier wearing the Viking ship left sleeve badge of the brigade (see Plate H3).

March/April 1920: the crew of a Daimler ZVR armoured car named 'Herta', from Schwere Kraftwagen Abteilung 10 ('Heavy Vehicle Detachment 10'), photographed in Wesel at the time of the Ruhr fighting.

bloodiest chapter in the long fight between the Free Corps and the German Communists. After five days of cruel fighting the Ruhr was entirely dominated by the Free Corps. But this concentration of German troops in the Demilitarised Zone violated the Treaty of Versailles and, in response, Allied troops also entered the Ruhr, forcing the Free Corps to retreat towards the east.

The 'Black Reichswehr'

After the failure of the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch the government excluded from the Reichswehr most of the generals who commanded Free Corps, among them Maercker, Von Oven and Von Lettow-Vorbeck. Other Free Corps commanders were jailed (Von der Goltz) or had to go into exile (Ehrhardt). General von Seeckt had very clear ideas about the kind of soldiers he wanted in his ranks: non-political, highly disciplined, and officered by men of the highest professional qualifications. There would be no room in the Reichswehr for 'Landsknechts' who accepted the authority only of their own chiefs, and followed them blindly, in defiance of High Command orders or even of the state itself.

On the other hand the Allied Military Control Commission, settled in Germany since the beginning of 1920, demanded the disbandment of all the Free Corps, not only those which had taken part in the Putsch. Finally, in August 1920, the German government promulgated a law ordering that all organisations and individuals illegally in possession of military weapons should deliver them to the authorities: only the Reichswehr had the right to bear that kind of arms. A few Free Corps were definitively integrated into the Reichswehr, but the new order of battle helped to dilute them (the brigades were abolished and the remaining military units re-organised in divisions). For the most part the Free Corps officially ceased to exist.

Hans von Seeckt was also a realist, however. It was clear to him that a 100,000-man army, only recently organised, would not be able to defend Germany in the case of war with Poland, which clearly aimed to profit by the weakness of its two historical enemies – Germany and Russia – to build a 'Greater Poland' *(wielkopolska)*. In April 1920 Poland started a war against Soviet Russia, and Von Seeckt feared that Germany would be next. It was necessary for the Reichswehr to have trained reserves which could be mobilised easily. Thus the so-called 'Black Reichswehr' was born, in a striking echo of Von Scharnhorst's clandestine reform of the Prussian Army in 1807–13 during the period of Napoleonic domination.

Hauptmann Rudolf Berthold, the much-wounded and highly decorated Bavarian fighter ace who led the Eiserne Schar Berthold until he was captured and butchered by Reds on 15 March 1920 during the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch. Note on his left sleeve the badge of his 'Iron Band': a 'B' surrounded by oakleaves, apparently in white or silver-grey.

To avoid the Versailles limitations, several paramilitary organisations were raised or maintained in existence. As mentioned above, since April 1919 many cities had organised militias called **Einwohnerwehren** ('Citizen Forces'). Although formed by civilians, without uniforms or military armament, they were led by veteran wartime officers and NCOs. There were many local formations of this kind, usually taking the name of the town or quarter where they had been raised: the Einwohnerwehr Essen, Einwohnerwehr München, Einwohnerwehr Hamburg, Berliner Schutzenburgerwehr, Hanauer Burgerwehr, Einwohnerwehr Gau Passau, and so forth.

Another paramilitary organisation was the **Volkswehren** ('People's Forces'), a kind of militarised police force under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior. Armed with light military weapons and dressed in *feldgrau* uniforms, such forces had a local character and, theoretically, could not be used outside their cities. Also created at this time was the **Technische Nothilfe** ('Emergency Technical Aid'), made up of engineers and technically trained men, whose task was to maintain public services in case of disturbances or catastrophes. The **Verkehrswehr** ('Traffic Force') was created to protect communications of all kinds (railways, telephone network, etc.); and the **Küstenwehren** ('Coastal Forces') had responsibility for controlling coasts and harbours. All these paramilitary organisations strengthened the Reichswehr's defensive capacity – but not only in the case of revolution. In time of war the Einwohnerwehren and the Volkswehren could be turned into infantry units; the Technische Nothilfe and the Verkehrswehren could be transformed into engineer troops, and the Küstenwehren could reinforce the Navy.

The **Zeitfreiwilligen** (roughly, 'Timed Volunteers') units were also created from soldiers enlisted for only three months at a time. In this way many men could be trained without surpassing the 100,000-man limit. Theoretically, they were intended to reinforce the Reichswehr in confronting civil unrest; actually, they would be used to increase the number of Reichswehr units in case of war. The first Zeitfreiwilligen units were organised by Free Corps chiefs during their 1919 campaign in Central Germany. In many places the Zeitfreiwilligen were arranged in regiment- or battalion-sized units (e.g., Zeitfreiwilligen Regiment Leipzig, Zeitfreiwilligenkorps Remscheid) so that they could be mobilised as regular units at short notice.

Finally, there were the so-called **Arbeitkommando**. Officially these 'Labour Commands' were civilian workers' teams employed by the Reichswehr; in fact they were thinly camouflaged military units. They wore *feldgrau* uniform, were quartered in military barracks, and were led and trained by Reichswehr officers. These Arbeitkommando were deployed along the Polish border, and totalled some 20,000 men.

All these more or less covert military organisations which composed the 'Black Reichswehr' used up much of the surplus manpower that the Reichswehr could not absorb – and, particularly, many Free Corps veterans.

The underground Free Corps

Not all Free Corps veterans accepted demobilisation to civilian life, however, and from 1920 their most radical elements began to be drawn

into the political arena. They created a huge variety of organisations, both legal and clandestine: youth organisations, small political parties, sports shooting clubs, veterans' brotherhoods, rural working communities, etc. Others organised underground terrorist groups which became very active from 1921, assassinating prominent politicians such as the Versailles signatory Matthias Erzberger and the senior minister Walter Rathenau, and making attempts against many others. Many of these 'underground' Free Corps maintained secret caches of weapons and received military training from Reichswehr officers.

In Bavaria the relationship between the Reichswehr and such clandestine groups was especially close. The Organization Escherich ('Orgesch'), created to co-ordinate the Bavarian Einwohnerwehren units, furnished the armed groups which overthrew the Bavarian SPD government in March 1920 and put Von Kahr in power; and henceforward the relationship between Bavarian units of the Reichswehr and former Free Corps leaders would be warmly co-operative. Supported by Bavarian political leaders, the commander of the Bavarian Wehrkreis, Gen.von Lossow, defied Berlin's orders and shielded the Free Corps veterans. The most famous Bavarian Free Corps, FK von Epp, easily melted into the Reichswehr units garrisoned in Bavaria. Von Epp's chief-of-staff, Hauptmann Ernst Röhm – a name which would later become more widely known – was especially active in protecting Free Corps veterans. Many political groups stemming from the Freikorps movement which were forbidden in the other German states were tolerated in Bavaria. The National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), created by a young radical named Adolf Hitler, attracted many extremist Free Corps veterans. The NSDAP's militia used several titles before settling on the Sturmabteilungen (SA, 'Assault Detachments'); in its first years it seemed to be just another Free Corps successor group[5].

Three officers of III.Marine Brigade von Löwenfeld, which played a major role in the spring 1920 operations in the Ruhr. (Left) Korvettenkapitän Kolbe, CO of I.Bataillon, Marine Regiment 5; (right) Kapitänleutnant von Fischel, CO of the regiment's II Btl; (centre) the former U-boat ace Kapitänleutnant Lothar Arnauld de la Perrière, CO of the brigade's Sturmbataillon. The brigade collar badges are worn by all three (see Plate H6), and both De la Perrière and Von Fischel have the Imperial U-boat badge pinned to their left breast.

The Bavarian Reichswehr commanders even provided such groups with weapons; ostensibly presented as Zeitfreiwilligen units, they were given field-grey uniforms and included in military parades and manoeuvres. But for these radicalised former Free Corps men the ultimate goal was no longer to fight against Communist revolutionaries or to defend German borders, but to destroy the Republic and to 'liberate Germany from the Versailles yoke'.

This did not mean that the 'Red Peril' or the Polish threat had disappeared, however. From mid-1920 the SPD lost a great part of its political importance, and many of its members moved towards the extreme left. In December 1920 the USPD integrated into the KPD, forming a large bloc which was no more interested in parliamentary democracy than were the right wing extremists.

5 See MAA 220, *The SA 1921–45: Hitler's Storm Troopers*

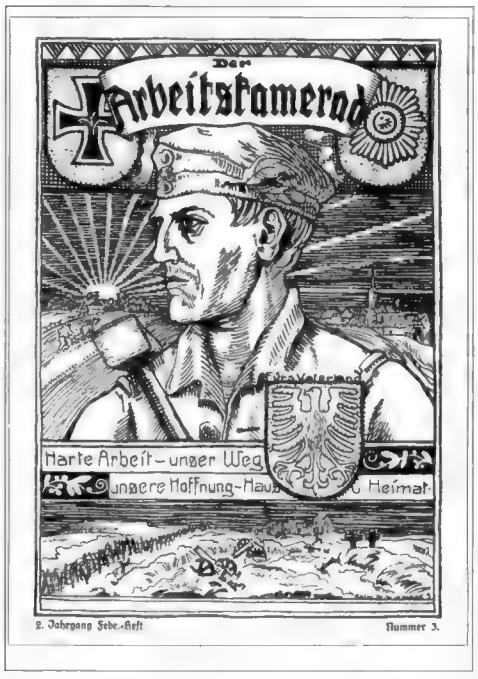
A representative Zeitfreiwillige troop from Hanover. Most are in civilian clothes; the leader is probably the middle-aged man (4th from right, standing) in full uniform complete with Iron Cross 2nd Class ribbon.

A motley group of volunteers from a Duisburg Einwohnerwehr; again, the uniformed veteran posing on top of the truck is presumably the leader.

1921: The *März-Aktion*

Ever since its foundation the KPD had closely followed the orders received from Moscow through the Comintern (the Communist International). In March 1921 a great revolt against Communist Party abuses broke out among the sailors in Kronstadt, posing a real threat to the Soviet leadership. To provide a distraction, Moscow ordered Communist parties all over Europe to launch armed risings. In obedience, the KPD started the so-called 'März-Aktion' which lasted from 17 March to 1 April. It called a general strike throughout Germany, but armed groups rose only at a local level, mainly in Central Germany. These were easily crushed by the Police – without calling on Free Corps support, as had been necessary a year before.

The time of the Free Corps seemed to have passed away; but in spring 1921, despite having been officially disbanded, they would write one of the most important pages of their history.



Magazine cover of an Arbeitsgemeinschaft – 'Labour Community' – stressing themes of both war and work. Note the veteran's death's-head cap badge. The 'labour communities' formed by Freikorps veterans worked and lived together, as harvesters, foresters, etc.; many kept caches of weapons ready for the day when the Fatherland needed them again.

UPPER SILESIA

The redrawing of the frontiers between Germany and Poland had caused great tension in these borderlands since November 1918. Versailles handed over to Poland the Posen area, together with the part of West Prussia through which the Danzig Corridor passed north to the Baltic coast. Plebiscites would decide the fate of two other areas – southern East Prussia and Upper Silesia – where mixed populations would vote whether to continue under German rule or to join Poland. The former region voted in 1920 to remain German. Upper Silesia presented a more prolonged and bloodier problem, with numerous armed clashes between 1918 and 1921.

In 1918, as in the Posen area, the Poles took advantage of the chaos in Berlin to try to take possession of Upper Silesia, a region of major economic importance with an ethnically mixed population. Some Free Corps were raised in German-speaking areas, e.g. the Oberschlesisches Freiwilligenkorps led by Oberstleutnant von Velsen; and these succeeded in halting the advance of the Polish nationalists. Again as at Posen, in February 1919 the Upper Silesian Free Corps counterattacked until their advance was stopped by an Allied ultimatum. This fixed a provisional demarcation line, to apply until the plebiscite was held. It was believed that Upper Silesia would be divided between the two countries; but the Polish nationalists of the POW determined to annex the entire region and present the Allies with a *fait accompli.*

The POW assembled about 22,000 armed militia for this second attempt and, after a campaign of political agitation and sabotage, they attacked during the night of 16 August 1919. The local Free Corps which had fought earlier that year were now reinforced by units from other German regions, including the formidable Ehrhardt Brigade and Von Löwenfeld's powerful III.Marine Brigade. These were joined by others including FK Dohna (Hptm.Dohna), FK Hessische-Thuringische-Waldekischen (Oberst von Kornatzky), and Freiw.Regt. Tüllmann (Hptm.Tüllmann). The total strength was some 14,000 men, led by a unified command under Gen.Höfer. These forces launched a counter-attack on the night of 18 August, and by the 23rd they had expelled the POW from all the positions they had taken.

In February 1920 an Allied Commission arrived to take control of Upper Silesia in the run-up to the plebiscite. To guarantee public order a contingent of Allied troops were stationed in the region, mainly French

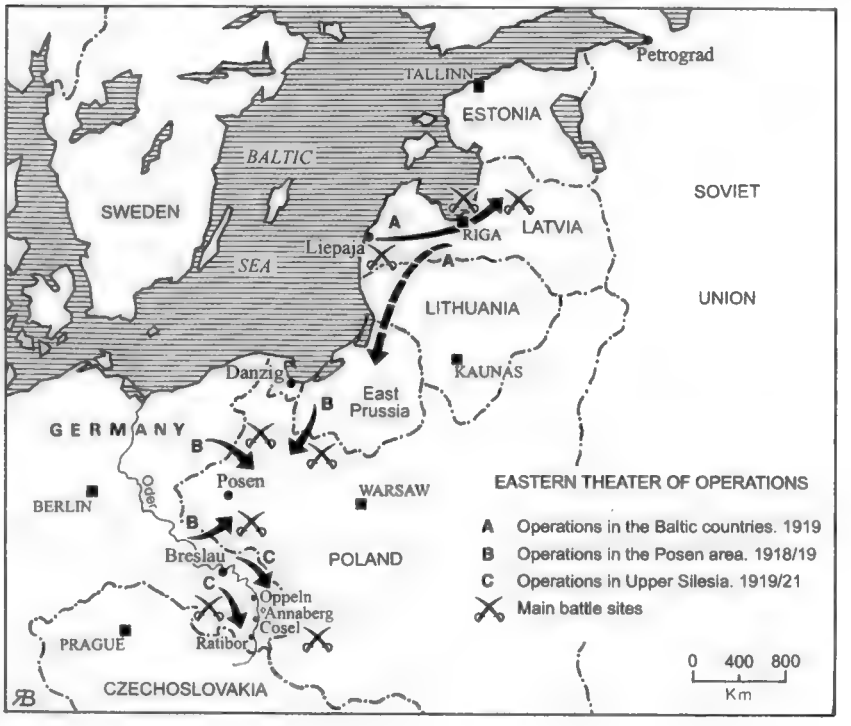
Major von Kircheim, CO of a Jäger battalion which took his name. The collar badge is a white metal Edelweiss with long stem and leaves.

but also Italians and British. The plebiscite was held in March 1920, and 60 per cent of the inhabitants voted to remain German. The Allies accordingly tried to settle a final demarcation line – a baffling task, given the intermixing of the communities between mainly urban Germans and mainly rural Poles. The months dragged by, with both communities inflamed by contradictory rumours. In early April 1921 the POW began to prepare, with more care than before, for a fresh attempt to take over the whole region. In the predominantly German zones numerous self-defence groups – Selbstchutzen – were created and led by First World War veterans; among these were e.g. Selbstschutz Bataillon Bergerhoff, Selbstschutz Kompanie Beuthen, Selbstschutz Btl.Lublinitz, Selbstschutz Btl.Wolff, and Oberschlesisches Freiw.Btl.May. At the end of April, however, the Selbstschutzen leadership cadres were all arrested by French troops.

On 2 May 1921 the Polish insurrection began. Under cover of a general strike the POW soon gained control of all the cities. At the same time weapons of all kinds – including armoured trains – began to arrive from Poland, as well as some battalions of the regular Polish Army. Sabotage of communications almost isolated Upper Silesia from the rest of Germany, obstructing the arrival of German reinforcements. The Allied troops did nothing to combat the insurrection, with the exception of the Italians, who suffered 250 casualties in the attempt. By 5 May the POW controlled all of Upper Silesia east of the Oder River, with the exception of three small German bridgeheads held by the Selbstschutzen units.

Surprised by the Polish insurrection, the Berlin government could only appeal to Western capitals to honour the plebiscite results and the new borders fixed by the Allies themselves. The Reichswehr was not ordered to intervene. The armed German response came from the Free Corps, although officially disbanded almost a year beforehand. In many

Major Hiller von Gaertringen, chief of the Grenzschutz Jäger Bataillons ('Frontier Defence Rifle Battalion') von Hiller. On his sleeve is the shield badge of his Freikorps, and on his collar the fir tree and swords insignia of the Frontier Troops of the 17th (West Prussian) Army Corps – see also Plate C1.



Grenzschutztruppen fighting Polish forces in the industrial quarter of an Upper Silesian town.

cases their members had kept in touch informally, or through old comrades' associations; in others, the Freikorps had ostensibly been converted into political groups – e.g. the FK Oberland was now known as Bund Oberland ('Highland League'). Finally, many Free Corps fighters had integrated themselves in Arbeitgemeinschaft ('Working Communities') in which they lived and worked together, pursuing land improvement schemes, farming or forestry, while waiting for the opportunity to get back into action.

The extraordinary fact was that, without anybody giving a specific order, members of the old Free Corps, either as individuals or as entire units, headed towards Upper Silesia. Veterans of the battles for Berlin, the Baltic and the Ruhr collected their weapons from clandestine depots and travelled to the aid of the Upper Silesian Selbstschutzen. Some joined these units; others quickly reorganised their old companies or battalions, now disguised as Selbstschutzen units. They came from as far away as the South Tyrol, an Austrian region annexed by Italy after the First World War.

Meanwhile the local Selbstschutzen set up a defensive line in three different sectors. The southern sector ran along the western bank of the Oder River; the central sector lay on both sides of Oppeln (Opola in Polish); and the northern extended from Oppeln to the Polish border. The defence was led by Gen.von Hülsen, a veteran of the earliest Free Corps campaigns. In the southern sector heavy fighting took place around the German bridgeheads at Cosel (Kozle) and Ratisbor (Raciborz). The central sector was the quietest, since the Allied Control Commission HQ was based in Oppeln and nobody wished to provoke them. In the heavily forested northern sector guerrilla warfare developed without well-defined positions.

Once the lines were relatively stabilised the Free Corps chiefs in Upper Silesia met to choose a commander-in-chief of all German troops. Present were the most active Free Corps leaders, such as Heydebreck, Rossbach, Von Arnim, Horadam, Hauenstein, Magnis, Von Chappuis, Hübner, Von Aulock and Von Velsen. In 1918 most of them had been only lieutenants or captains; now each of them had a devotedly loyal unit under his personal orders. General Höfer was appointed commander-in-chief, and

Poster urging a vote for Germany in the Upper Silesian plebiscite of March 1920. Death brings a Polish shako down over German industrial buildings; the slogan read 'Attention, Upper Silesians – Choose German'.

A 'poor man's army' – the Selbstschutz Bataillons Gogolin may represent all the Upper Silesian units. At left, its leader Oberleutnant von Frobel, and beside him Leutnant von Eicken, are distinguished only by two and one white cloth stripes respectively worn on the upper arm. The usual Upper Silesian Self Defence shield (see Plate H19) is pinned to their caps; and their unit badge (see Plate H22) is worn on their left forearms.

he decided to reorganise his assets into two task forces. The southern force, which Von Hülsen would continue to command, would deploy along the Oder. The northern force, led by Oberstleutnant Grüntzen, would operate in the forests near the Polish border.

Although Höfer favoured more cautious tactics, Von Hülsen instilled an aggressive spirit in his command, of which the largest unit was the Bavarian FK Oberland. Von Hülsen's plan was to storm the Polish-held Annaberg hill on the eastern bank of the Oder, a feature from whose peak the Oder Valley could be dominated. Apart from strategic advantage, the Annaberg offered an important propaganda prize: a religious sanctuary which stood on the hilltop was a potent national symbol for Silesian Germans.

At dawn on 21 May 1921 Von Hülsen's troops began their assault up the steep slopes of the Annaberg, and at midday, after hard fighting, they occupied the summit. This success had a tonic effect on the morale of the Free Corps: it was seen as 'the first German victory since November 1918'. On the 23rd a heavy Polish counterattack was repulsed.

However, the Berlin government refused to support this struggle; on 24 May they forbade volunteer enlistments for Upper Silesia, and threatened serious penalties for anyone attempting to reorganise the disbanded Free Corps. The government had little choice in this matter, since the Allies were threatening the occupation of the Ruhr if the Free Corps were not stopped in Silesia. A plan to deploy the Allied troops in the region to separate the Free Corps from the POW came under discussion; but Gen.von Hülsen launched his men into another attack on 4 June, defeating the Poles once more. In the northern sector, meanwhile, guerrilla warfare continued, and Free Corps units including those of Rossbach, Von Aulock and Hübner were slowly driving the Poles back before their advance.

Finally, at the end of July, the Allies deployed their troops as a pacification force between the Germans and Poles. In an ordered way both the POW and the Free Corps disengaged and retreated simultaneously. The Allied Control Commission again took total control over the region, and the territory was divided as had finally been decided after the plebiscite.

The intervention of the Free Corps had succeeded in defending German territory which had been assigned to Germany by the Allies, but which the POW had shown themselves determined to annex in the three successive risings between 1919 and 1921. Nevertheless, the Berlin government refused to recognise the contribution of the volunteers, who had to leave the region the same way they had come – secretly; and even the local Selbstschutzen were disbanded. Once more, the volunteers had been given a reason for bitter resentment against the government of the Republic.

(continued on page 43)

BERLIN, DECEMBER 1918–MARCH 1919

1: Unteroffizier, Freiwilligen Regiment Reinhard

2: Volunteer, Freiwilligen Landesschützenkorps

3: Matrose, Volksmarine Division

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MUNICH, MAY 1919

1: Unteroffizier, Bayerisches Schützenkorps (Freikorps von Epp)

2: Volunteer, Freikorps Bayreuth

3: Volunteer, Freikorps Werdenfels

THE BALTIC FRONT

1: Lt Rossbach, Freiw.Sturmabteilung Rossbach, late 1919

2: Volunteer, Baltische Landeswehr, May 1919

3: Volunteer, Eiserne Division, May 1919

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BERLIN, MARCH 1920

1: Korvettenkapitän Ehrhardt, II.Marine Brigade Wilhelmshaven

2: Gefreiter, Freiw. Landesjägerkorps (Freikorps Maercker)

3: Machine gunner, II.Marine Brigade Wilhelmshaven (Brigade Ehrhardt)

THE RUHR, APRIL 1920

1: Jäger, 37. Jäger Bataillon (Freikorps Rossbach)

2: Volunteer, Akademischen Wehr Münster

3: Volunteer, Regt Rosa Luxemburg, Ruhr Red Army

OPPONENTS OF THE FREIKORPS

1: Officer, Latvian Communist *Streltsi*; Riga, May/June 1919

2: Volunteer, Lithuanian Nationalist *Savanoris*; winter 1918/19

3: Volunteer, Polish Military Organisation (POW); Upper Silesia, 1919–21

4: POW commemorative breast badge

1: Volunteer, Selbstschutz Oberschlesien; Upper Silesia, May 1921
2: Armband, Selbstschutz Oberschlesien
3: Volunteer, III Sturmfahne, Freikorps Oberland; Upper Silesia, May 1921
4: Volunteer, Bund Oberland; Munich, November 1923

FREIKORPS BADGES

See text commentaries for details.

FREIKORPS FLAGS, MEDALS & HELMET INSIGNIA

See text commentaries for details.

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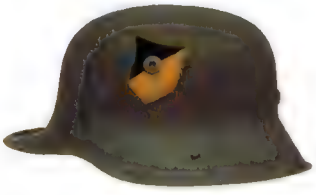

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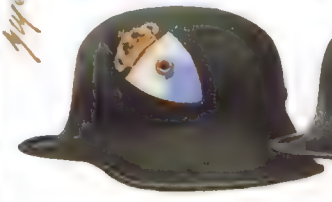

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(I) FRIEDENSHEERES, January 1919; and
(II) VORLÄUFIGEN ('PROVISIONAL') REICHSWEHR, May 1919. See text commentaries for details.
(III) Oberleutnant, 24. leichte Artillerie Regiment, summer 1919

1922–23

Throughout 1922 the political, social and economic situation deteriorated. The SPD continued its decline, many of its former supporters passing to a KPD which still dreamed of a revolutionary seizure of power. The extremist right wing terrorists continued their underground campaign against the government. In Bavaria the national government's decision to forbid all monarchist activities alienated the conservatives. The economy was suffering from the payment of the massive war reparations imposed under the Versailles Treaty, and from August 1922 the value of the currency began to sink.

Some Free Corps veterans paid close attention to political developments in Italy where, in October 1922, Mussolini carried out his 'March on Rome' and won power. His Fascist Party, too, included many Great War veterans – fiercely anti-Communist ultra-nationalist, and supporters of dictatorial government. In Germany there were those who dreamed of a 'March on Berlin'.

1923: French occupation of the Ruhr

On 11 January 1923 French and Belgian troops entered the Ruhr on the pretext that Germany had fallen behind in paying war reparations (Britain and the USA abstained from this adventure). This was not the first time that the French had marched into the Ruhr; they had done so in May 1920, in response to the Free Corps operations against the Ruhr Red Army, and again in March 1921, to demand German punctuality in payment of reparations. French objectives were actually more ambitious. In their occupation zone in the Rhineland they openly supported secessionism; it was at French instigation that, in June 1919, a so-called Rhineland Republic had been proclaimed, though this project failed to attract popular support.

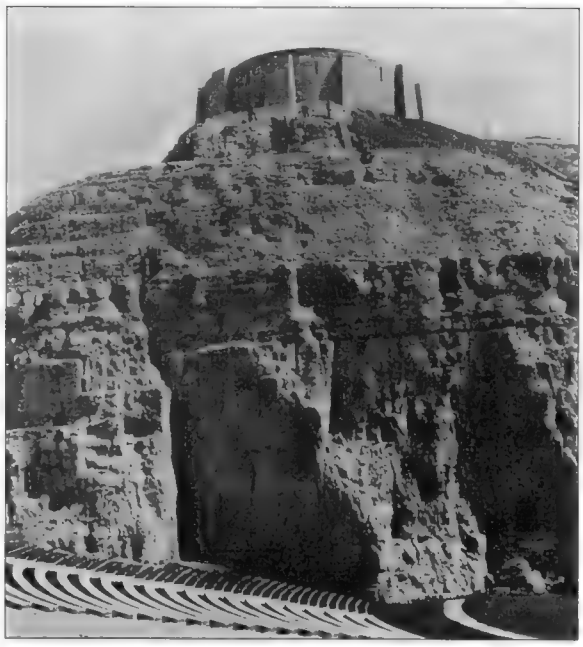
Flag ceremony, 'Selbstschutz Regiments Schlesien' – actually, the FK Rossbach (see Plate I3). With his back to the camera, Hptm.Gerhard Rossbach touches the flag which he designed for his Freikorps.

After this third French occupation the German government inmediately issued a call for passive resistance, which received overwhelming popular support. Clashes soon broke out between the occupation troops and the local inhabitants; and members of the 'underground' Free Corps began to travel to the Ruhr to carry out covert actions. German 'collaborators' with the French were their main targets, and on 31 March the leader of the Rhineland-Palatinate secessionist

movement was murdered. Predictably, the French troops responded to sabotage and assassinations with reprisals and executions.

On 26 May the French shot an Army and Freikorps veteran named Albert Leo Schlageter for blowing up a bridge. In a Germany traumatised by the French occupation Schlageter immediately became a national martyr (a decade later the Luftwaffe's Jagdgeschwader 26 fighter wing would be named after him).

In September 1923 the German government decided to end the passive resistance campaign, but the underground struggle continued. On 21 October, again at French instigation, a Rhineland Republic was proclaimed, soon followed by a Palatinate Republic; a group of Ehrhardt Brigade veterans murdered the politician named as president of the latter. Although the French stayed in the Ruhr for some months more their attempts to encourage secessionism in western Germany failed.



A Freikorps memorial raised on the summit of the Annaberg after its capture on 21 May 1921.

Back to 1918?

While the industrial heartland of the Ruhr was brought to a standstill by French occupation and consequent German passive resistance, the German government resorted to wholesale printing of banknotes, sparking off the hyperinflation which destroyed the economy – in November 1923 a packet of cigarettes cost 4,000,000,000 marks. Economic collapse naturally caused enormous misery, fear and social unrest; and at the same time the decision to halt the campaign of passive resistance – 'capitulating to the occupiers' – enraged German nationalists. Besides the rumbling threats of Rhineland and Bavarian monarchist secessionism, in 1923 the beleaguered government also had to face the possibilities of both a right-wing Putsch and a Communist rising. At times it seemed that Germany was in serious danger of returning to the chaos of 1918.

The threat from the right came from members of the Arbeitkommando, the most important part of the so-called 'Black Reichswehr', in which the spirit of the Free Corps remained strong. Unrest over the government's ending of passive resistance in the Ruhr spread among officers and men, who believed they would have the support of the Reichswehr High Command for a coup. But the generals categorically refused to join them, and the projected coup dwindled to a mere mutiny on 30 September 1923, which was crushed by the Reichswehr without a single shot being fired. General von Seeckt took advantage of this opportunity to order the 'Black Reichswehr' disbanded; and the frustrated radical nationalists finally lost their belief that 'the Army would save Germany'. In future their hopes would be entrusted to political agitators such as Hitler.

At the other end of the political spectrum, the Communists had never been so strong. Social and economic chaos favoured the KPD, which won representation in the provincial governments of Thuringia

A mass grave at Leschnitz. The plaque reads: 'Here lie 21 valiant Self Defence fighters fallen in the days of the insurrection, 1921'.

and Saxony. The new national government led by Stresemann, which took office that September, abandoned a policy followed by all previous governments of the German Republic: friendship with Soviet Russia (e.g. the Treaty of Rapallo, 1922) and confrontation with the Western Powers. In Moscow this change of course was considered very dangerous, because it increased Russia's isolation. In the hope that the chaotic situation was favourable for a 'German October', the Comintern ordered the KPD to take to the streets. In late October a general strike was called, and there were attempts at armed insurrection in Hamburg and Berlin. However, the Police and the Reichswehr proved capable of suppressing these – and also of controlling the situation in Thuringia and Saxony, where the Communist-influenced administrations were overthrown by the military authorities.

In short, within one month and against a background of huge social dislocation, the government's troops and policemen had shown themselves entirely competent to put down a mutiny promoted by Free Corps veterans enrolled into the Arbeitkommando, and to crush an attempted Communist rising – without having to resort, as before, to the Free Corps. The divorce between the former Free Corps and the Reichswehr would soon become final, in Munich.

The last episode

In Munich, Gustav von Kahr's conservative government supported Bavarian autonomy and the restoration of the Wittelsbach monarchy. Since the Räterrepublik of April 1919 Bavarian conservatives had an overriding fear of the revolutionary left. Consequently they shielded the most radical anti-Communist groups; but this was an unstable alliance, since such groups were Pan-Germanists and enemies of Bavarian 'secessionism'. Alone in Germany, in Bavaria some Free Corps still existed hardly disguised, e.g. the Bund Oberland. The most dynamic element in Bavarian politics, however, was Hitler's NSDAP, with its street militia – the Sturmabteilungen (SA). Despite the fact that in 1920 its members were enrolled in a Zeitfreiwillige unit, and although Ehrhardt Brigade veterans had been accepted as cadres in 1921, Hitler was wary of allowing the SA to become too militarised.

Although Hitler had been sponsored by a typical Free Corps figure, Hauptmann Ernst Röhm, the two had very different agendas; and in 1921 Röhm had raised his own militia, the Reichskriegsflagge, which was solidly in the Freikorps tradition. In January 1923, in the fevered

Albert Leo Schlageter's biography was typical of a Free Corps fighter, and bears brief examination. A student in 1914, he volunteered for the Army on the outbreak of the Great War, during which he distinguished himself, winning the Iron Cross 2nd and 1st Class and a commission as Leutnant. In 1918 he joined the Free Corps and took part in several actions, particularly in the Baltic campaign. Later he joined Von Löwenfeld's III.Marine Brigade and fought in the Ruhr. He took part in the assault on the Annaberg in Upper Silesia in 1921. In 1922 he was one of the first to join Hitler's NSDAP; and on 26 May 1923 he was executed as one of the organisers of the underground armed resistance to the French occupation of the Ruhr.

atmosphere following the French occupation of the Ruhr, the Bund Oberland, Reichskriegsflagge and NSDAP linked up in a radical nationalist league; and as a 'liberation war' against France seemed imminent Hitler allowed his SA to receive military training. In September this federation was renamed the Kampfbund ('Combat League'); but by that point France was no longer seen as the main enemy, but rather the Berlin government which had yielded to her. Excited talk of a 'March on Berlin' attracted the most radical Free Corps veterans, such as Hauptmann Rossbach; but simultaneously there was much activity among the conservative Bavarian monarchists, who had a different agenda. In Munich each of these rival right wing groups tried to out-do the other by accelerating their plans, while Berlin tried to protect itself against them both.

On the night of 8 November a meeting of his followers held by Von Kahr was stormed by Hitler and his men; and instead of Bavarian independence, they proclaimed a 'national revolution'. Next day the Bund Oberland, Reichskriegsflagge and SA attempted to take control of Munich as a first step on their march to Berlin. This 'Beerhall Putsch' of 9 November 1923 was incompetently planned and executed, and was crushed with humiliating ease by the Police. Exactly five years after the beginning of the German revolution, the last remnants of the Free Corps had written the final chapter of their history.

THE FREIKORPS EXAMINED

To some historians the Free Corps have no place in military but rather in political history. This seems to ignore the obvious fact that in the 20th century civil wars have had as important consequences as conventional wars. Indeed, politically motivated volunteer soldiers such as the Freikorpskämpfer were decisive in 20th century conflicts too numerous to list, from the Red Guards of the Russian Revolution to the Vietminh of the 1950s and the Afghan *mujahideen* of the 1980s. The Freikorps fought and defeated the largest revolutionary leftist party in Western Europe; minimised territorial losses on their country's borders; and prevented national disintegration. They offer a close parallel to the more or less simultaneous achievements of Kemal Ataturk's Turkish nationalist army.

The units

Born under revolutionary circumstances and with an inevitably provisional character, each Freikorps adapted its own organisation and structure to its strength, resources and objectives. It is thus impossible to fix, even approximately, 'tables of organisation and equipment' for these units. Most of them appeared in the first months of 1919 and broke up at the end of that year. Some lasted just a few weeks before being integrated into larger corps. Many were created in reaction to some specific local threat, and disbanded when that threat disappeared. It is nevertheless possible to divide the Freikorps into several distinct categories.

In a first category we may place the largest formations, recruited by generals or colonels, which could field forces close to brigade or

divisional strength – i.e. several thousand men in several units, often with their own artillery, engineers and other support elements. Almost all of these were born from Imperial Army regular units. Examples include the Badischen Volksheer, Bayerischen Schützenkorps (FK von Epp), Deutsche Schutz Division, Garde Kavallerie Schützen Division, Freiw.Abt. Haas, FK Held, Freiw. Landesjägerkorps, Freiw. Landesschützenkorps, and Schutztruppe Regiment von Lettow-Vorbeck. Due to their important military strength, such Freikorps took part in various operations all over Germany. Their commanding officers were conservatives who had no enthusiasm for the Republic; but in general they had moderate political aims, and dissolved their units when the main dangers to the integrity of the state had receded. Usually these corps ended up integrated into the Reichswehr. (An exception was Gen.von Lettow-Vorbeck, who had led the wartime troops in German East Africa – today's Tanzania – with extraordinary boldness and skill. After his return to Germany following the Armistice his prestige quickly enabled him to raise the large Freikorps which took his name; but he was unable to adapt to changing realities, and was dismissed after the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch of April 1920.)

Their size, structure and widespread operations argue the inclusion in this first category of the three Marine Brigades, although those led by Ehrhardt (II.) and Von Löwenfeld (III.) were far more radical than most in their political complexion.

The second category embraces the majority of Freikorps: those raised in various cities and regions to defend public order against revolutionary attempts. They were of smaller size than those of the first group, with numbers rarely exceeding battalion or regimental strength – i.e. from a few hundred men to a thousand or more. Their existence was usually ephemeral. Unlike the largest corps, they were composed not only of veteran soldiers but also of like-minded civilian volunteers. Most of them used the title 'Freikorps', adding the name of their city or region. As examples from a very long list we may mention: FK Bamberg, FK Bayreuth, FK Bodensee, FK Chiemgau, FK Düsseldorf, FK Erlangen, FK Göttingen, FK Halle, FK Hessen, FK Landsberg, FK Münsterland, FK Oldenburg, FK Passau, FK Regensburg, FK Schleswig Holstein, FK Schwaben, FK Thüringen, and FK Würzburg. Sometimes these units did not use the Freikorps title; other denominations included the Wachabteilung Bahrenfeld ('Bahrenfeld Guard Detachment', in Hamburg), and the Westfälisches Jägerkorps ('Westfalian Rifle Corps').

Some of these locally or regionally recruited and based Freikorps built up strong units from small beginnings: e.g. the Württemburgisches Sicherheits Kompanie ('Württemburg Security Company') increased to no fewer than ten battalions, eight artillery batteries and three air squadrons.

Usually such corps never operated far from their areas of recruitment, but again there were exceptions. The most notorious of these was the FK Oberland, raised in Upper Bavaria, which fought in campaigns far from home. This was not the only case: the FK Hessische-Thüringisch-Waldekischen fought in Silesia; and the Badische Sturmbataillon ('Baden Assault Battalion') was among the hardest-fighting units of the Baltic campaign.

As a subgroup belonging of this second category we may mention the local self-defence corps raised in border regions: e.g. the Oberschlesien

Major-General von Roeder raised the Freiwilligen Landesschützenkorps in early January 1919; it played a prominent part in the clearing of the northern ports the following month, and later became IV Brigade of the Provisional Reichswehr. Note the wreath collar badges of this unit, and see Plate A2. Von Roeder also displays the wreath around his upper cap cockade.

Leutnant Paulssen raised his Freikorps in Silesia on 10 December 1918, and fought against Polish expansion attempts in Poznania. He chose as his unit's badge the black and silver shield of the Hohenzollern dynasty.

Freiwilligen Jägerkorps ('Upper Silesian Volunteer Rifle Corps'), Sächsische Grenzjägerbrigade ('Saxon Border Rifle Brigade'), Ost Preussische Freiwilligen Jägerkorps and FK Königsberg (East Prussia), and in West Prussia the Festung Freikorps Thorn ('Fortress Free Corps Thorn'), from what is now the Polish city of Torun.

In a third category we may include those Freikorps organised and led by junior officers – rarely those of field rank. Usually these were of roughly battalion strength, sometimes less (a strong company) or a little more (a weak regiment). In contrast to our first category, of units commanded by generals with moderate aims, and the second category, whose objective was normally local defence, in this third category we find the most radical Freikorps leaders and soldiers. The officers and men were hardened front-line veterans who could not accept that Germany had been defeated on the battlefield; they hated the left wing parties for 'stabbing them in the back', and hated the Republic which 'dishonoured Germany' by signing the Treaty of Versailles.

When revolution broke out in Germany many senior officers chose to leave the public scene until the storm had blown over. Into this vacuum stepped the young lieutenants and captains who gathered around them loyal soldiers who were ready to fight on. These groups could be said to embody the 'classic' Freikorps spirit; but their exclusive ésprit de corps was the great internal weakness of the Free Corps movement. Disillusioned with the political and military leadership of their country, most Freikorpskämpfer acknowledged no authority beyond that of their own chiefs; and consequently the Free Corps were never able to be more than a motley constellation of separate and more or less reduced military units. However, although they sometimes presented a picture close to military anarchy, when the time came to fight these fiercely independent groups did not hesitate to place themselves under superior orders, usually from Reichswehr generals, until the immediate objectives had been gained.

Some of these corps had traceable origins in old Imperial Army units, usually Guards Regiments, and used the names of their garrison cities (FK Postdam, FK Haccketau, etc.). Normally, however, they took the names of their leaders. This symbolised the deep personal bonds between the fighters and the chief around whom they had gathered – often a highly decorated and charismatic combat officer. Examples of this category of Freikorps, too, are very numerous; a purely representative list would include the FK von Aulock, FK von Brandis, FK von Brause, FK Brüssow, FK von Diebitsch, FK Dohna, FK Faupel (previously, FK Görlitz), FK Gabcke, FK Hübner, FK Hunicken, FK von Klewitz, FK Kühme, FK Lichtschlag, FK von Liebermann, FK Lierau, FK Liftl, FK Lützow, FK von Medem, FK Negenborn, FK Osterroth, FK von Oven, FK Paulssen, FK von Petersdorff, FK Petsch, FK Pfeffer, FK von Plewe, FK Severin, FK Thummel, and FK Wolf.

Sometimes the commander's name was preceded by other designations. Some units used the terms Abteilung ('detachment'), Freiwilligen Abteilung or Freiwilligen Bataillon, including those led by Bulow, Dorthenleitner, Glasser, Henke, Schaaf, Schad, Von Schauroth, Voighleitner, Von Waltzen and Wildermut. The term Regiment was rarely used, although one example was the Freiwillige Regiment Tüllmann. The word Sturm ('assault') appeared in such titles

as the Sturmabteilung Rossbach, Sturmbataillon Schmidt and Sturmbataillon Heinz. The term Schar (an archaic word translating roughly as 'band') was used occasionally, e.g. by the Freischar Lautenbacher, and the famous Eiserne Schar led by Hauptmann Berthold. Finally, these small corps occasionally took the name not of their own leader but of their First World War commander-in-chief – we find both a Freikorps Hindenburg and a FK Gen.Feldmarschall von Hindenburg.

It should be noted that not all Freikorps commanders came from the Army. The Navy's leading U-boat 'ace' Arnauld de la Perrière organised and led a Sturmbataillon which was integrated with the III.Marine Brigade. One of the most famous and charismatic leaders was the Bavarian Hptm.Rudolf Berthold of the Army Air Service. A fighter ace with 44 victories and the coveted Pour le Mérite, he had been shot down several times and suffered severe pain due to his wounds, but refused to leave his squadron and continued flying combat missions in a specially modified Fokker DVII. He raised his own Free Corps, 'The Iron Band', which fought in several operations including the Baltic campaign. During the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch his Eiserne Schar got isolated in Harburg, near Hamburg, and surrounded by large numbers of leftist militants. Berthold was captured and brutally murdered; finally strangled with the ribbon of his 'Blue Max', he was beheaded and mutilated.

In this third category the evolution of the different Freikorps was very uneven. Some disappeared quickly, while others survived for a long time, eventually as underground organisations. The dissolution of many allowed those which remained to grow, as in the case of the Sturmabteilung Rossbach, which at its peak gathered several thousand men.

Daily life in a Freikorps barracks room in Berlin-Neuenhagen – men, weapons and equipment muddled comfortably together.

Hauptmann Zenetti, CO of the Freiw.Batterie Zenetti, wears on the crown of his cap the *Totenkopf* badge of the Freiw. Jägerkorps Erlangen (see Plate H21) to which his battery was subordinate. He would certainly have been wearing on his left sleeve the badge of his own unit – see Plate H13.

Equipment and uniforms

Due to the type of (mostly street) fighting in which they took part, the equipment of most Freikorps was limited to infantry weapons supported by machine guns, mortars and flamethrowers. The use of artillery and tanks was less common but not unknown, especially among the largest formations. In all cases they used the standard equipment of the wartime Imperial Army, sometimes supplemented with captured items (e.g. British tanks). The old Air Service also contributed elements to the Free Corps, but the use of aircraft was generally limited to reconnaissance and 'propaganda bombing' i.e. leaflet drops.

The uniforms used – covered at greater length in the commentaries to the Plates, pages 55–63 – were those of the Imperial Army, either with the original rank insignia or those of the Friedensheeres ('Peace Army') or Vorläufigen Reichswehr ('Provisional Imperial Force') regulations. Most Freikorps also displayed some insignia peculiar to themselves. These unit badges were of many different types: heraldic shields from the recruiting area; Germanic traditional, military or 'folklore' emblems; the initial letter of the commander's name, etc. Some were more sophisticated, such as the Ehrhardt Brigade's Viking ship. One emblem displayed by several units was the 'Hakenkreuz' – the swastika, which was later copied from the Freikorps by the Nazi Party. The 'Totenkopf' ('Death's Head') was also widely seen; the centuries-old badge of elite Prussian and Brunswick units, it had also been used during the Great War by some assault troops, tank units and pilots. As for flags, the Freikorpskämpfer clung to those of Imperial Germany, the battle flag of the Kaiserlischenmarine being one of the most often flown – though several Free Corps, like Rossbach's, also had their own flags.

The volunteers

The Freikorps were raised from volunteers, and for that reason any study should take account of their motivations. It is impossible to determine exactly how many men served in total. Seeking to explain away the Spartacists' defeat, leftist sources have claimed ridiculous figures of up to one million. The more usually accepted estimate is about 150,000 men. After four years of atrocious war the great majority of German soldiers wanted nothing more than to return to their families. What reasons impelled so many men to continue fighting? Two activist minorities can be identified against the background of the war-weary masses.

One was composed of those whose wartime experiences had turned them into left wing activists, impelled by hatred of the system which had condemned them to four hellish years in the trenches, and their families

to poverty and famine. They had believed in the Fatherland, the Army, and their leaders; they had made unspeakable sacrifices for them; and they felt they had been betrayed. They returned home completely disillusioned with the prevailing social and political systems. Many of them embraced pacifism at any price; but others, more violently aroused, looked to the Communist parties then arising all over Europe, and enlisted in their militias.

In the Volksmarine Division and the various 'Red Armies' that sprang up all over Germany there were plenty of old 'front fighters'. This invites a question: since many had similar military experience to that of the Freikorps veterans, why were they defeated by them – especially when they often enjoyed an advantage in numbers? One explanation must be that in the Freikorps the so-called 'military virtues' of discipline and obedience were preserved and exalted, and along with them real combat effectiveness. The revolutionary veterans served in militias which explicitly rejected such hierarchies and values, and which consequently ended up as little more than armed gangs.

The second activist minority was the one which created the Freikorps movement. Despite the horrors, their wartime experiences had impressed on them enduring values and beliefs: patriotism, sometimes exalted to a mystical level; a deep sense of military honour and duty; a need to see the many lives lost as sacrifices in the service of a meaningful cause; and unshakable loyalty to their comrades and battlefield leaders. For such men reintegration into bourgeois peacetime life was almost an impossibility. They inhabited a separate mental world, where fighting spirit, heroism and comradeship were the only true values. These men existed in all the combatant nations, where they found whatever outlets they could – in Germany they enlisted in the Freikorps.

They shared two main phobias: towards Communist revolutionaries who threatened a crippled Germany after 'stabbing the Army in the back', and bourgeois politicians and profiteers who had stayed safe at home while leading the nation to disaster. Beyond these common hatreds they were divided by a great disparity of ideas. Few of these men were politically educated, none had ever lived under a functioning liberal democracy, and most were driven by raw emotion rather than any sophisticated ideological analysis. Fervent nationalism and anti-Communism were the twin motors of their passion, and these were enough for most of them.

Some yearned for the 'good old days' of the Kaiser and dreamed of a Hohenzollern restoration; but many were prepared to support, even to protect the Republic – as long as it was able to impose its authority, establish law and order, and defend German interests and prestige. Before 1914 the SPD was Europe's biggest Socialist party, with widespread support among the working class from which most of the German Army was

May 1919: men of the Volkswehr Regiment Regensburg (badge, inset) resting after the liberation of Munich. Top left, having a snack on top of the wagon, is Leutnant Rudolf Hess.

recruited. Many of the Freikorps veterans were former SPD voters, some even militants. But the Republic could not satisfy them. It was born amid revolutionary chaos; during its first years it faced economic and social crisis; and in their minds it was indelibly tainted by the ruinous and shameful Treaty of Versailles.

Polizei-Oberst Ritter von Pitrof, chief of the FK Schwaben. As a good Bavarian he chose the Edelweiss as his badge. On his collar he wears a small white metal version; but his unit also used, indiscriminately, a cloth version on a light blue collar patch – see detail below.

A distinct group within the Freikorps movement, perhaps the least numerous but the most active in the longer term, neither wished for the restoration of the old regime nor could approve, under any circumstances, the Weimar Republic. These were the radicals who worked for a nationalist dictatorship which they believed would quickly restore Germany's unity and strength, enforcing a social programme to cleanse her of degenerate foreign influences. Eventually, they got their way...

Combat achievements

Some of the Freikorps rarely engaged in combat, while others fought from Kurland to the Ruhr. It is estimated that the armed confrontations between rival factions in Germany in the period 1918–23 cost some 25,000 lives. This figure, though considerable, is far lower than the number of deaths registered in other European civil conflicts of the interwar period (e.g. the so-called Finnish War of Independence, which actually had strong elements of a civil war).

The Freikorps' victories were due, to a great extent, to their unquestionable military superiority over the various Red militias which faced them. Although the Freikorps were greatly outnumbered in Berlin, Munich and the Ruhr they enjoyed advantages in discipline, high motivation, competent and resolute leadership, and tactical experience. They won even though most of these operations involved street-fighting, for which the Imperial Army was not trained. Their opponents often broke when confronted by the acid test of an energic and well-organised assault.

The Polish, Latvian and Estonian forces which the Freikorps faced in the border wars cannot be considered as regular armies in the usual sense of the term, but rather as patriotic militias in the process of evolving into national armies. However, since the Freikorps which fought them lacked many of the normal resources of a regular army, we can reasonably speak of roughly matched opponents.

Obergeometer Rudolf Kanzler, chief of the FK Chiemgau. Note the two insignia on his left arm. The upper one is that of the Bayerische Schützenkorps – usually called the FK von Epp – to which his unit was subordinate (see Plate H2). Below it, on a matching diamond-shaped patch of field-grey cloth, is that of FK Chiemgau – see detail: an eagle's head motif, in this case mounted on a black diamond.

In such confrontations the Freikorps did not always win, but their performance against the Poles was remarkable. The Polish POW nationalist militia were combative, highly motivated, well organised, and backed by professional officers and NCOs with Great War battle experience in other armies; but they never achieved even one significant victory over the Freikorps. In the first Baltic campaign the Freikorps defeated the Russian Red Army – an army still in the process of development, but one which was capable of inflicting considerable defeats on the Whites. In all these successes, from the streets of Berlin to the slopes of the Annaberg, a major element was the aggressive spirit and flexible, opportunist tactics inherited from the Stosstruppen – the assault units of the First World War.

From Stosstruppen to Waffen-SS

With Europe's most 'scientifically' perfect army, Germany in 1914 was confident of defeating her rivals by means of sophisticated strategic plans and a machine-like excellence in their execution. Instead, the sweeping movements planned by the General Staff became bogged down in a dreadful trench war along a front of 400 miles, where a generation died under massed artillery fire in months-long battles of attrition for trivial gains. As early as 1915 there grew from the ranks of the front-line units one idea of how to end this nightmare stalemate: the 'shock' or 'assault troops' (Stosstruppen or Sturmtruppen).

The shock units soon formed by every division were hand-picked (often from volunteers) for bravery, initiative and aggression. Small, well-integrated units armed with a range of light and heavy weapons – from knives, pistols and grenades to mortars, flamethrowers and light cannon – they were trained to attack independently, using fire-and-movement tactics to exploit any opportunity to penetrate the enemy's front lines and press ahead. These assault battalions proved very successful, and spearheaded Germany's last great advance of spring 1918. In these units the typically rigid Prussian discipline was transformed into a closer comradeship between officers and men based on mutual trust. When scientifically planned warfare no longer worked, the Army had to resort to the warrior qualities of these small

groups of highly motivated soldiers. (Perhaps the best published account of these troops is *Storm of Steel*, the memoir of the remarkable soldier/intellectual Ernst Junger.)

Many Stosstruppen veterans joined the Freikorps, to which they transmitted their shock tactics and ésprit de corps. For some, the 'old model' regular Army had failed its most critical test; it had to be replaced by a 'new model', a fanatical volunteer army ready to fight under any circumstances.

When the Reichswehr was reorganised Gen.von Seeckt imposed once more the traditional Prussian ethos; it was to be a force of highly qualified military technicians, working with clockwork precision. The Wehrmacht was based on this heritage, and achieved impressive results between 1939 and the end of 1942. But from that date onwards the Second World War, according to all military orthodoxy, was lost for Germany. It was from 1943 that something of the Stosstruppen spirit reappeared in a new form, with the great expansion and privileged position of the Waffen-SS units. The historical bridge which linked the Stosstruppen to the Waffen-SS was the Freikorps, whose spirit was openly invoked in the SA and SS. This time victory must be snatched from defeat, not by the meticulous plans of a General Staff which Hitler regarded as defeatist, but by the offensive spirit of fanatical fighting men. It was no coincidence that the man put in command of the premier Waffen-SS formation, the *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*, was Josef 'Sepp' Dietrich – an old Freikorps fighter and veteran of the battle of the Annaberg.

Once again, however, fanaticism proved unable to prevent final defeat; and this time there would be no unoccupied Germany in which embittered veterans could continue to bear arms as they tried to reshape the future.

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THE PLATES

A: BERLIN, DECEMBER 1918–MARCH 1919

A1: Unteroffizier, Freiwilligen Regiment Reinhard

This hardened veteran, wearing both classes of the Iron Cross (EK) – not very common for an NCO – is a *'Supper'*, one of the 1,500-strong all-NCO battalion raised by Offizierstellvertreter Suppe and now integrated into Oberst Wilhelm Reinhard's Freikorps. Initially a simple white armband was worn for identification; the badge adopted later is illustrated as Plate H1. His steel helmet is the M1918 (sometimes wrongly called the M1917); this introduced improved chinstrap attachments, replacing the M1891 straps used in the Pickelhauben M1895 and 1915 and the M1916 Stahlhelm. He retains the M1914 tunic, its *feldgrau* shade now somewhat faded, with eight crested brass buttons, and still piped in red like the old M1907/10 tunic. The shoulder straps are piped white for the infantry, with unit numbers embroidered in red; the gold Tresse collar braid marks ranks from Unteroffizier (senior corporal) upwards. His M1917 trousers, in a darker shade of field-grey, are confined by puttees (Wickelgamaschen) above M1901 ankle boots; puttees were widely used in the Freikorps, as they had been among the assault infantry of the wartime Sturmtruppen. His unsupported belt is overloaded with two full sets of triple M1909 cartridge pouches (26 January 1910 regulations), with a total of 120 rounds for his 7.92mm Gewehr 98 bolt-action rifle; and three M1917 Stielhandgranaten. Just visible behind his right and left hips are the M1887 Brotbeutel haversack, and the massive M1898/05 Seitengewehr bayonet.

A2: Volunteer, Freiwilligen Landesschützenkorps

This unit was raised and led by Generalmajor von Roeder in early January 1919. The M1916 helmet is worn, with the M1915 Bluse tunic (21 September 1915 regulations). Of field-grey, it has collar facing in dark green 'badge cloth'; the circular oakleaf wreath on both sides was the insignia of this Freikorps, and appeared in a couple of slight variations. The Bluse has six large zinc or bone front buttons concealed by a fly flap, and two slanted skirt pockets with painted iron buttons; another pair secured the detachable shoulder straps, which were often removed in the Freikorps. The M1917 Stiefelhose trousers are of poor quality field-grey cloth. On his belt, which is supported round his neck by the canvas and leather haversack strap, are the usual two sets of M1909 cartridge pouches plus a holstered P 08 pistol. Ordinary volunteers quite often acquired sidearms, following the traditions of the Stosstruppen, among whom the pistol was no longer a privilege of officers and senior NCOs only. His Kar 98A carbine was a preferred weapon for street-fighting.

A3: Matrose, Volksmarine Division

This seaman is a representative of the hardest enemy unit which the Freikorps faced at this period; it was led by a 'broken' former lieutenant, Matrose Dorrenbach, until he was killed in May 1919. All national insignia have been removed; these were often replaced by a red cockade or a red armband. The *'Küste Artillerie'* cap tally identifies his former service with one of the coastal batteries which defended the north German ports. This is the winter uniform, authorised for wear between 20 September and 20 April each year. The double-breasted pea jacket, with ten crested brass buttons, has the plain collar patches in cornflower blue of an ordinary seaman. The bell-bottomed trousers are in the same wool material. Armed to the teeth, our Red sailor carries the standard Gewehr 98, and round his neck the grey cotton Patronentragegurte supplementary bandolier holding 14 clips of five rounds. On his belt is a non-regulation holster for some type of 7.65mm civilian pistol; and one three-pocket M1909 pouch set holding another 12 rifle clips. Finally he carries a Prussian 0/St 1818 infantry sabre, now reissued as a watchman's sword.

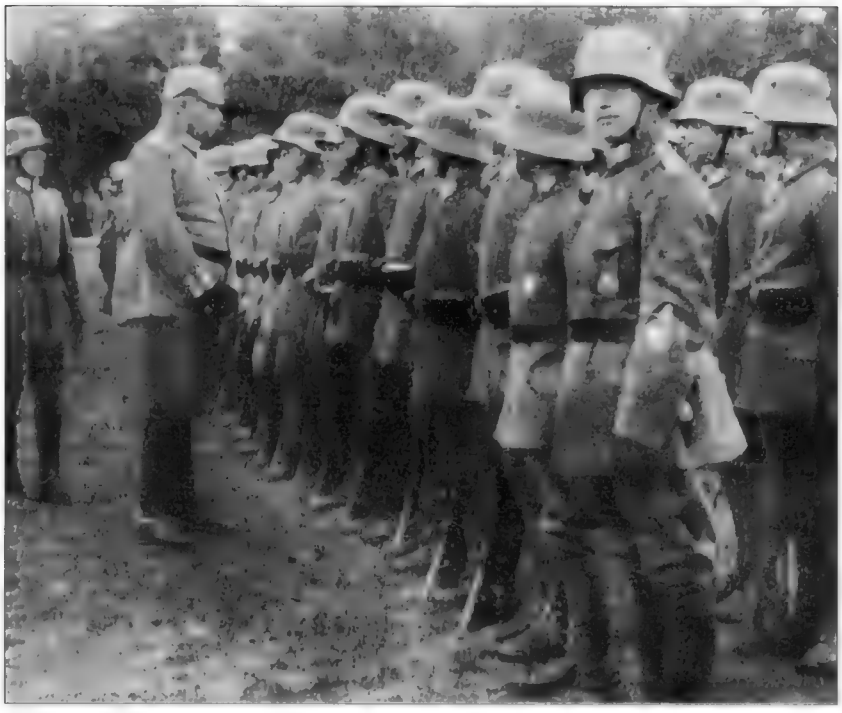
Major Josef Bischoff, leader of the indomitable Eiserne Division in the 1919 Baltic campaign; note the 'Prussian' *Totenkopf* cap badge of this formation (see Plates C3, H14).

B: MUNICH, MAY 1919

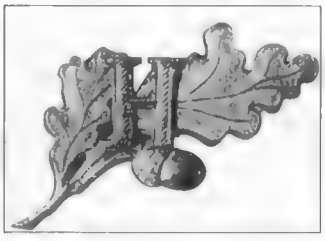
B1: Unteroffizier, Bayerisches Schützenkorps (Freikorps von Epp)

In the first days of May 1919, after the suppression of the Räterepublik, a veteran NCO of Bavarian Stosstruppen shows off his squad's 'wonder weapon'. About 35,000 examples of the 9mm Machine Pistol 1918 (more popularly, *Kugelspritz* or 'bullet-hose') were made during the war, and many were issued to the assault battalions. The Bergmann MP 18 was fed by 32-round 'snail' drum magazines originally developed for the long-barrelled P 08/14 'artillery' pistol; our NCO also has one of these, with its detachable wooden stock attached to the back of the regulation holster, as well as a trench knife (Grabendolch).

His M1916 helmet is finished in the camouflage of green, ochre and red-brown segments divided by black lines



Generalfeldmarschall Paul von Hindenburg reviews volunteers of the FK von Hindenburg at Kolberg, March 1920. Their sleeve badge (see nearest officer) was an 'H' surrounded by oakleaves; their collar badge is shown below. This unit is not to be confused with the Selbstschutz Bataillon GFM von Hindenburg, another Freikorps whose cuff title is illustrated as Plate H24.



prescribed in Gen Lüdendorff's order of 7 July 1918. The M1915 Bluse is entirely in field-grey, without the collar facing of dark green – a Bavarian peculiarity, as was the NCO collar Tresse in blue and white instead of matt metallic braid. His ribbon of the Iron Cross 2nd Class, a silver Wound Badge, and the badge of a qualified machine gunner on his sleeve testify to his Great War service; he has also added to his left sleeve the badge of the Freikorps led by Oberst Franz Ritter von Epp (see Plate H2). His light field-grey M1917 trousers have the leather knee patches typical of Stosstruppen; puttees, standard issue in 1918, could be of any drab shade between light grey and dark brown.

B2: Volunteer, Freikorps Bayreuth

A peculiarity of the unit raised in this Bavarian town (see Plate H9) was the use of French M1915 helmets with the front crest removed and the 'horizon blue' finish overpainted dark field-grey. Their old-fashioned outfit included the M1907/10 Feldrock in field-grey with Brandenburg cuffs, red piping and crested brass buttons, and black M1895 cartridge pouches.

B3: Volunteer, Freikorps Werdenfels

This burly farmer from the hills wears the typical civilian dress of the Oberland, especially the Lederhosen. His armband in Bavarian colours, bearing a plain black diamond, is seen in photographs; for the slightly more elaborate official insignia of the Werdenfels district Freikorps see Plate H7.

C: THE BALTIC FRONT, 1919

C1: Leutnant Rossbach, Freiwillige Sturmabteilung Rossbach (37.Jäger Bataillon), late 1919

One of the more interesting young radical Freikorps leaders, Leutnant (later Hauptmann) Gerhard Rossbach had been a wartime officer in 175.Artillerie Regiment. Here he is dressed in Jäger style as he appeared in October/November 1919 in Kurland on the Baltic. He raised his own 'Volunteer Assault Detachment Rossbach' as early as 27 November 1918; it was later integrated into the Provisional Reichswehr as the 37.Jäger Bataillon. The 'Rossbachers' appeared in many episodes during this period: fighting in the Ruhr and on the Silesian front, in the Arbeitgemeinschaften (Working Communities), in the march to the Felherrnhalle, and beyond.

He wears an M1916 Stahlhelm and an officer's quality M1915 Bluse. His shoulder straps of rank in matt silver cord have Jäger green underlay. On the green 'badge cloth' standing collar is the insignia of the *Grenzschutztruppen des 17.(Westpreuss.) Armeekorps* – the Frontier Troops of the 17th (W.Prussian) Army Corps: a highly symbolic fir tree with crossed swords over the torn-up roots. On his right sleeve is the badge of his Freikorps, a St Hubert's cross above a chevron in national colours (see Plate H16). On the left breast is his Iron Cross 1st Class below a ribbon bar; he retains his old belt with the crowned 'WII' monogram on the brass buckle. Officer's riding breeches worn with puttees and ankle boots complete the uniform.

C2: Volunteer, Baltische Landeswehr, May 1919

This trooper serves, at the time of the first assault on Riga, with a cavalry squadron in the Landeswehr raised from Baltic-German volunteers in Kurland by Maj.Fletcher. His uniform consists of the M1916 Stahlhelm, M1915 Bluse (with shoulder straps piped in the Baltic colours of light blue and white – see Plate H15), breeches and riding boots with spurs. Note the rear belt support system of two side hooks and two rear buttons. On the front of the M1895 belt are two triple sets of cavalry ammunition pouches (5 August 1911 regulations). Basically similar to the M1909 infantry set, the M1911 held just half the number of cartridges – two five-round clips in

Group of Freikorps/Provisional Reichswehr armoured car commanders; the vehicle is one of the M1914 Austin-Putilovs, with two off-set machine gun turrets, captured on the Russian front during the Great War. All except the officer in the foreground wear French Army issue motor transport drivers' and tank crews' black leather coats with black cloth collar facing, to which metal uniform buttons have been added. The 2nd man from the left and 3rd from the right have NCO *Tresse* on their tunic collars; 3rd left wears collar *Litzen*; 2nd right has added shoulder straps to his leather coat, apparently field-grey and bearing the red 'K' of the wartime Kraftfahrtruppen. Both provincial and national cockades are worn on all the caps.

RIGHT **Close-up of two figures from the photo above. (Left) has a white metal *Totenkopf* badge between his cap cockades, of the so-called 'Brunswick' shape associated with Freiw.Jägerkorps Erlangen, and Btl Reinchenbach within FK Hasse (see Plate H21). The officer (right) wears a very dark M1919 service cap; a tunic with green 'badge cloth' facing at the collar but not, apparently, the cuffs; and wartime shoulder straps. The insignia on his left forearm are a white 'Prussian'-shaped *Totenkopf* on a black oval, above a cuff title 'Kampfwagen' in the same colours. Below his Iron Cross 1st Class is pinned the Imperial Air Service pilot's badge.**

each, totalling 60 rounds. (They were later universally adopted by the Wehrmacht and used throughout the Second World War.) Slung from his shoulder is a Kar 98A 7.92mm carbine. His other weapon is the M1890 all-steel lance in blued finish, with a knurled grip of black composition material and a polished head; a pennon in *Baltikum* colours is attached by four brass rings. Our trooper is feeding his best friend; the care of mounts was encouraged, in some units – e.g. Gen Maercker's Freiw.Landesjägerkorps, and FK von Diebitsch – by a special award, the Medaille für Gute Pferdepflege.

C3: Volunteer, Eiserne Division, May 1919

Armed with the ubiquitous Gewehr 98, this soldier is one of the followers of a prominent Freikorps leader, Maj.Bischoff of the indomitable 'Iron Division', which played a leading part in defeating the Red Army in Kurland. His M1910 Feldmütze field cap still bears both Imperial and state (here, Prussian) cockades; between them is pinned the *Totenkopf* insignia of the Eiserne Division (see Plate H14). His tunic is the universal M1915 Bluse; but he has managed to lay hands on a pair of special M1914 trousers in *steingrau* colour, reinforced by doubling at the knees – these were originally destined for the field artillery. He has tucked a trench dagger into his puttees, which are made of *ersatz* material in one of any number of indefinable colours. Again, the 'bread bag' sling is used to support the weight of the pouches; the belt buckle is the Prussian M1915 in painted iron.

D: BERLIN, MARCH 1920

D1: Korvettenkapitän Ehrhardt, II.Marine Brigade

A leading figure in the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch of 13 March was Korvettenkapitän Hermann Ehrhardt, who despite holding a naval rank equivalent only to major led the 6,000-strong II.Marine Brigade Wilhelmshaven – later retitled Brigade Ehrhardt. A conservative nationalist, Ehrhardt would later unsuccessfully contest the leadership of the right wing factions with the revolutionary nationalist Adolf Hitler. Unlike their leader, many of his brigade would later rally to the NSDAP.

He wears a Schirmmütze service cap according to the 19 January 1919 regulations for the Friedensuniform – see also commentary to Plate J – with the Prussian provincial cockade. A double-breasted greatcoat (Mantel) had been adopted by this date, but he still wears the single-breasted M1915 of officer quality, with six buttons and the collar faced with 'badge cloth'; his shoulder straps are of plaited silver cord. The leather belt with Imperial Navy buckle supports a holstered P 08 semi-automatic pistol.

Volunteer and officer of the Selbstschutz Sturmabteilung ('Self Defence Assault Detachment') Heinz. Both wear civilian soft caps with different-sized Edelweiss badges pinned to the left front; and the M1915 Bluse without shoulder straps. On their breasts they wear the Selbstschutz Oberschlesien shield (see Plate H19) common to all volunteer units which fought in Upper Silesia. The badge of Heinz's unit is just visible above the left elbow of the volunteer, and clearly on the officer's forearm; the white stripe below the latter is a simple rank badge for a Leutnant.

The detail shows the unit's badge. The wreathed anchor is similar to that worn by III.Marine Brigade von Löwenfeld, but here on a ribbon in Silesian colours – yellow, white, yellow.

D2: Gefreiter, Freiw. Landesjägerkorps (Freikorps Maercker)
A young soldier of the first major Freikorps to be raised, from 14 December 1918 by Gen Maercker of the 214.Infanterie Division. It would participate significantly throughout 1919 in Berlin, Magdeburg, Weimar and Leipzig. Maercker adopted an ambiguous stance during the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch, supporting neither side, and suffered for it.

Our subject wears the standard M1916 helmet. A cravat (the colours varied) can be seen under the collar of a very late-manufacture M1915 Bluse; green 'badge cloth' for collar facing was sometimes unavailable. On both sides of the collar 25mm buttons mark his rank of Gefreiter, an intermediate grade between first class private and corporal. The silver oakleaves were adopted by Maercker as his corps' badge from its creation. Armament and equipment are conventional; note on the M1917 grenade the belt hook, and the handle marking indicating a 5½-second delay fuse.

D3: Machine gunner, II.Marine Brigade Wilhelmshaven (Brigade Ehrhardt)
The large white swastika – painted by many *Freikorpskämpfer* on the M1916 helmet, in different presentations and to widely varying standards of neatness – was an ancient Indo-European 'sunwheel' symbol which Adolf Hitler would only later adopt for his NSDAP. On both sides of the collar of the M1915 Bluse is the badge of the Garde Kavallerie Schützen Division (see Plate H8). During the Berlin fighting of March 1919 the brigade was subordinated to an Army formation, the Garde Kavallerie Schützen Korps, named after its parent division, and all units were ordered to use this badge. The Ehrhardt Brigade continued to use it after the dissolution of the Korps. The ribbon of the Iron Cross 2nd Class (EK II) and black Wound Badge are reminders of this volunteer's war service. On his left arm is the brigade's badge of a Viking ship or *Drakkar* (see Plate H3). His trousers are the M1914 *stein-grau* type and retain the red side seam piping.

As the No.1 in an MG 08/15 team he carries the unofficial but widely seen 'broomhandle' Mauser 1896 semi-automatic pistol modified to take the 9mm Parabellum cartridge; this was indicated by a '9' scored into the grips and painted red. Its wooden holster/shoulder stock hangs from a strap, and his belt supports a set of M1909 pouches to hold its ten-round clips.

D4: One of the workhorses in the arsenal of the Freikorps was the MG 08/15, a modification of the tripod-mounted, water-cooled 7.92mm MG 08 machine gun. Although very heavy at 19kg (42lbs), it did give the infantry some portable fire support and thus improved tactical flexibility. Feed was by 100- or 250-round canvas belts; here a 100-round steel drum is fitted.

E: THE RUHR, APRIL 1920

E1: Jäger, 37. Jäger Bataillon (Freikorps Rossbach)
This unit was subordinate to the '3.Kavallerie Division' for the Ruhr fighting. The rifleman wears a uniform modified in accordance with the Provisional Reichswehr regulations of 5 May 1919. The only distinctive insignia of the FK Rossbach is the white arrow painted on his helmet, for this operation only. His wartime-made M1915 Bluse, retaining its original fly front, has had the collar and cuffs faced with green, the shoulder straps replaced, and two breast pockets added

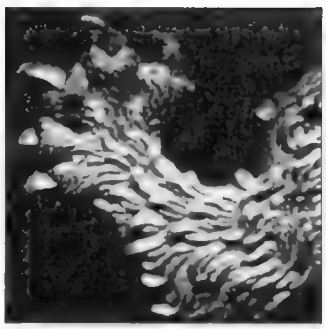
Machine gun team from Kompanie Schlageter, Sturmbabteilung Heinz; the left-facing *Hakenkreuz* was particular to this company. Though blurred, this photo does show the use of plentiful insignia on the left sleeve of the standing gun commander. The anchor and ribbons badge of Sturmabteilung Heinz can be seen on his upper arm. Below it is the horizontal rank stripe for Gefreiter, in accordance with May 1919 regulations; and below this the Imperial Army qualified machine gunner's badge. The pale mark visible on his left breast is the Selbstschutz Oberschlesien shield.

(slightly slanting); the Kragenspiegel have been added to the collar, and oval unit badges piped in Jäger Waffenfarbe to both sleeves (see Plate J, II & III). He wears the new type puttees with a buckled fastening strap. His Kar 98A, M1898/05 bayonet, and M1909 pouches on the new open-buckle M1919 belt are conventional.

E2: Volunteer, Akademischen Wehr Münster
This unit, led by Hauptmann Naendrop, was subordinate to the Division Münster. The volunteer wears the M1918 helmet with ear cut-outs; this had been intended as general army issue, but the end of the war prevented it. His Bluse and his equipment are conventional; hidden here is the unit's left arm insignia, a small embroidered triangle. Of interest are the pair of sandbags slung round his neck, Stosstruppen-style, bulging with stick grenades. He is unscrewing the safety cap of an M1917 Stielhandgranate to expose the pull-bead and cord of the friction igniter; on the handle are marked its time delay and the maker's initials. The size specifications for the manufacture of hand grenades had generous tolerances, with one exception: the weight of 820g was constant, so that the troops could become accustomed to it for accuracy of throwing.

E3: Volunteer, Regiment Rosa Luxemburg, Red Army of the Ruhr
This representative of the Freikorps' enemy in the Ruhr is dressed in civilian clothing apart from the old M1866 boots. He shows his ideological loyalty by his red scarf and armband (though the use of either one was more common than both). This unit was largely composed of ex-sailors, who

Major von Klüfer, chief of the Freiwilligen Regiments Klüfer, chose as the collar badge for his unit this bear's paw, attached with the spread claws pointing away from the centre.



also used to replace their cap bands with red ribbon. He has a brand new 7.92mm Gewehr 98 from one of the Ruhr armament factories, and an M1884/98 bayonet hanging from its frog (Seitengewehrtasche).

F: OPPONENTS OF THE FREIKORPS

F1: Officer, Latvian Streltsi ('*Strelki*'), Red Army; Riga, May/June 1919

From 1915 the Russian Imperial Army had included Latvian (Lettish) volunteer rifle battalions named after the 17th century *streltsi* or 'shooters' – a prestigious title. Many Latvians joined the Revolution in 1917, and would rise to high rank in the internal security organisation. In October 1918 the Bolsheviks renamed all their infantry as *streltsi*; and the Latvian Rifle Brigades were among their best units, vital to the survival of the Revolution during the fighting on the Petrograd front.

Although no rank insignia are worn, and officers' rank titles had been abolished, this *Kraskom* ('Red commander') is still identifiable as such. He has pinned to his left pocket the enamelled, officer's version of the Imperial *streltsi* badge, on which the red star has replaced the Tsarist eagle. His cap, with its stiffener ring removed in wartime fashion, also bears the red star. His M1912 *gymnastiorka* (shirt-tunic) has been stripped of its shoulder boards and crested brass buttons, the latter replaced by composition civilian examples. Note that it buttons right over left, in female style, and also the tucked-in collar. His brown leather M1912 field belt has a small whistle pouch on the left brace. Quantities of the 'broomhandle' Mauser 1896 7.63mm semi-automatic pistol, complete with wooden holster/stock, were bought by the Russian government before the war.

F2: Volunteer, Lithuanian Nationalist *Savanoris*; winter 1918/19

With the exception of his cap this patriot is dressed in traditional Lithuanian peasant costume. The so-called 'Kaunas' cap is patterned after the British style, and has a yellow band and piping and a cockade bearing the national emblem of the *Vytis* medieval knight. On his left arm is a triangle in the yellow, green and red national colours. His rifle is the Russian M1891 7.62mm Mosin-Nagant with fixed bayonet; ammunition is carried in a Russian belt pouch, and he has a couple of German stick grenades.

F3: Volunteer, Polish Military Organisation (POW); Upper Silesia, 1919–21

He has pinned to his civilian cap the M1919 national eagle badge ('Orzel wz.19'); he wears an industrial worker's coat and civilian trousers, with German field-grey puttees. His Kar 98A, M1909 pouches and grenade are from stocks left behind by the retreating German armies after the Armistice.

F4: POW commemorative breast badge.

G: UPPER SILESIA, 1921; & MUNICH, 1923

G1: Volunteer, Selbstschutz Oberschlesien; Upper Silesia, May 1921

Typical of the many 'Self Defence' organisations which sprang up among the German communities in disputed territories of the former Reich after the Armistice, his appearance tells us something of the nature of this 'poor man's army'. With a civilian soft cap he wears an old, well-worn M1915 Bluse, civilian trousers, and home-made blanket puttees tied with string. Lacking pouches, he has his pockets full of five-round Mannlicher-type clips for his old but still serviceable 7.92mm Gewehr 1888. A civilian knapsack carries provisions and personal items. Pinned to his jacket is the shield badge common to all the Selbstschutz Oberschlesien units (see Plate H19). This was also worn, often in conjunction with their own badges, by the Freikorps from other regions which came to fight in this campaign.

G2: Armband, Selbstschutz Oberschlesien

This was used by all units before the introduction of the metal shield badge in early 1920.

Hauptmann Cord von Brandis, chief of the Freikorps of that name which fought in the Baltic campaign. The detail shows the collar badge of his unit – an elk's antler.

G3: Volunteer, III Sturmfahne, Freikorps Oberland; Upper Silesia, May 1921

This Bavarian volunteer of 2/III.Sturmfahne (2nd Company, III Assault Battalion) of the FK Oberland is singing as he marches up to the assembly point for the assault on the Annaberg. With no support from his government, he wears civilian clothing buttoned to give something of a martial look; from his worn-out uniform he retains nothing but his M1916 helmet. The silver Edelweiss painted on this is the badge of the FK Oberland, and the metal shield advertising his attachment to the cause of the Selbschutz Oberschlesien is pinned to his left sleeve. A ten-pocket cotton Patronentragegurte bandolier holds a total of 14 five-round clips, its ends tucked under his M1895 belt; this has an old brass buckle with the Bavarian motto 'In treue Fest'. The ankle boots and high socks are traditional in the Bavarian highlands.

G4: Volunteer, Bund Oberland; Munich, November 1923

After five years' struggle in the ranks of the FK Oberland, now officially the 'Bund Oberland', this Bavarian veteran is ready for the last act in the military history of the Freikorps: the attempted Munich Putsch of 9 November 1923. A diamond-shaped Edelweiss badge is pinned to the left side of the black wool ski-type cap much favoured at that time by the members of his organisation. His jacket is the M1915 Bluse stripped of all insignia; he has added his NSDAP armband to the left sleeve. His trousers and puttees are also field-grey. As the 'ammunition number' for an MG 08 heavy machine gun he is holding the tag end of a 250-round web belt from the ammunition box.

H: FREIKORPS BADGES

This is a small selection from hundreds of examples. The insignia of the Freikorps were chosen by their leaders and paid for by the wearers. After the integration of the Freikorps into the Provisional Reichswehr in March 1919, however, units had to seek permission for their display from their regional Reichswehrgruppenkommando.

H1: Freiwilligen Regiment Reinhard – arm badge.
H2: Bayerisches Schützenkorps (FK von Epp) – arm.
H3: II.Marine Brigade Wilhelmshaven (Brigade Ehrhardt) – arm badge. A second pattern bore the name of its leader 'Ehrhardt' instead of 'Wilhelmshaven'.
H4: Freikorps Oberland – collar and headgear; also Freikorps von Medem – collar.
H5: Freikorps von Hülsen – collar.
H6: III.Marine Brigade von Löwenfeld – collar.
H7: Freikorps Werdenfels – armband.
H8: Garde Kavallerie Schützen Division – collar.
H9: Freikorps Bayreuth – arm.
H10: Freikorps von Oven – on shoulder straps.
H11: Schütztruppen Regiments 1 von Lettow-Vorbeck – arm.
H12: Minenwerfer Abteilung Heuschkel (trench mortar detachment) – arm.
H13: Freiwillige Batterie Zenetti (artillery) – arm.
H14: Eiserne Division – headgear; also Freikorps Brüssow – collar.
H15: Baltische Landeswehr – shoulder strap piping.
H16: Sturmabteilung Rossbach – arm.
H17: Selbstschutz Bataillon Heydebreck – arm.
H18: Freiwillige Russische Westarmee – arm.
H19: Selbstschutz Oberschlesien – arm and breast.
H20: Freikorps von Pfeffer – arm.
H21: Freiwilligen Jägerkorps Erlangen – collar and/or headgear; also Selbstschutz Bataillons Schwarze Schar – arm; and Bataillons Reinchenbach (in FK Hasse) – headgear.
H22: Selbstschutz Bataillons Gogolin – arm.
H23: Freikorps Potsdam – arm.
H24: Selbtschutz Bataillon Generalfeldmarschall von Hindenburg – cuff title.

One of the former naval officers who led Freikorps was Korvettenkapitän Michael. The left sleeve badge of his unit was an elk's head over a scroll bearing the words 'Detachement Michael'. Note that both Von Brandis (page 61) and Michael wear the *Baltenkreuz* decoration – see Plate I5.

I: FREIKORPS FLAGS, MEDALS & HELMET INSIGNIA

In each case we illustrate only a handful of the range of designs observed in use by the many units raised. In a special ceremony on 9 November 1933, the tenth anniversary of the march on the Feldherrnhalle, all the Freikorps flags were deposited in the Brown House in Munich; it was announced to the assembled veterans that 'In the end, you have won'.

I1: The Imperial Reichskriegsflagge was the only one acceptable to all Free Corps and used by most of them. The black, red and gold flag of the new Republic was hated as a symbol of defeat.

I2: Flag used by the Eiserne Division, 1919.

I3: Flag used by the 'Selbstschutz Regiment Schlesien' – a cover name for the Sturmabteilung Rossbach in Silesia, 1921.

I4: Flag of I.Bataillon, 2.Kurlandische Infanterie Regiment (Freiwilligen Bataillon von Liebermann), 1919.

Orders & Medals:

I5: Baltenkreuz (Baltic Cross).

I6: Schlesische Adler (Silesian Eagle).

I7: Kärntenkreuz of the Ostmark (Carinthian Cross, Austria).

I8: Eiserne Division Medaille (Iron Division Medal).

I9: Rossbachkreuz (Rossbach Cross).

I10: Deutscher Ordensschild, Grenschutz Ost (shield of the Teutonic Knights Order, Eastern Frontier Defence Forces).

Helmet insignia:

I11: Freikorps Randow, 1919–20.

I12: Used by an Einwohnerwehr in Munich colours, 1919.

I13 & 14: Two of many variants displayed by Bavarian Freikorps, 1919–20.

I15: Kompanie Schlageter within Selbstschutz Sturmabteilung Heinz, 1921 – only one of many examples of the use of this symbol.

I16: The *Totenkopf* was probably the most popular motif, appearing in innumerable variations painted on Freikorps helmets and vehicles, irrespective of the official badges of particular units.

J (I): FRIEDENSHEERES, JANUARY 1919

An Army directive of 19 January 1919 (Armeeverordnungsblatt 1919 Nr.85) gave the first uniform regulations for the peacetime German Army. On the widely used visored field caps (Schirmmützen) the Imperial cockade was forbidden and only Landeskokaden in provincial colours were allowed. The only authorised sidearm for most officers, NCOs and troops was the infantry bayonet, Seitengewehr M1898/05, though sabres and daggers were allowed to men with over 25 years of active service.

The basic uniform of the Imperial Army was retained, but with a new sequence of rank badges showing the 'proletarian' influence of Soviet Russian models rather than traditional German military symbols. All ranks from Unteroffizier to General were indicated by blue cloth stripes on the left sleeve; officers often pinned metallic unit numbers to their lower rank stripe. The shades of blue cloth varied widely according to availability. The Imperial-style shoulder straps with arm-of-service coloured piping and unit numbers were retained for enlisted men and NCOs, but the officers' metallic braid Schulterstücke disappeared from both tunics and greatcoats.

Enlisted ranks:

J1: Shoulder strap design for all enlisted ranks, including senior NCOs. **J2:** Unteroffizier **J3:** Sergeant & Fähnrich **J4:** Vizefeldwebel **J5:** Feldwebel & Offizierstellvertreter

Officer ranks:

J6: Leutnant & Feldwebelleutnant **J7:** Oberleutnant **J8:** Hauptmann **J9:** Major **J10:** Oberstleutnant **J11:** Oberst **J12:** Generalmajor **J13:** Generalleutnant **J14:** General (der Infanterie, etc.)

J (II): VORLÄUFIGEN REICHSWEHR, MAY 1919

In practice the Friedensheeres was extremely short-lived; and on 5 May 1919 another directive (Armee verord-

nungsblatt 1919 Nr.811, based on Reichswehrministerium Nr.604/5.19 B3 decreeing formation of a 'Provisional' Reichswehr) established new regulations replacing those of January.

Rank badges became slightly more elaborate, and were made in matt silver Tresse braid. They were to be displayed on both tunic sleeves, together with an *'Armscheibe'*, also worn on both sleeves by all ranks up to colonel. This was an oval patch, 80mm x 55mm, piped in arm-of-service colour and bearing a unit number and/or speciality badge. A single design of shoulder cords (Schulterschnüre) was prescribed for all ranks from private to general, only the materials and colours varying.

Enlisted ranks:

J15: Shoulder cords in field-grey cotton, for Wehrleute (privates), Gefreiter & Obergefreiter. **J16:** Gefreiter & Obergefreiter (Infanterie). **J17:** Unteroffizier (Schützen). **J18:** Shoulder cords in matt silver Tresse, for NCOs from Unteroffizier up. **J19:** Sergeant & Fähnrich (Kavallerie). **J20:** Vizefeldwebel (Train). **J21:** Feldwebel (Pioniere). **J22:** Offizierstellvertreter (leichte Artillerie).

Officer ranks:

J23: Shoulder cords for officers, in matt silver Tresse with bright silver slides. **J24:** Feldwebelleutnant & Leutnant (Minenwerfer). **J25:** Oberleutnant. **J26:** Hauptmann. **J27:** Major. **J28:** Oberstleutnant. **J29:** Oberst. **J30:** Shoulder cords for general officers, of matt gold Tresse. **J31:** Generalmajor. **J32:** Generalleutnant. **J33:** General.

J (III): Oberleutnant, 24.leichte Artillerie Regiment, summer 1919

This neatly uniformed first-lieutenant displays (perhaps rarely) the full Provisional Reichswehr uniform of 5 May 1919 regulations. It must be emphasised that against a background of political and organisational chaos, the Provisional Reichswehr was formed largely from Freikorps units wearing a mixture of Imperial, Friedensheer and Provisional Reichswehr items, frequently with their own Freikorps badges.

The field-grey M1919 service cap (Dienstmütze), with the band faced in green 'badge cloth', is piped in arm-of-service colour at the crown and band – here, red for artillery. The Landeskokarde – here black and white for Prussia – is now worn on the crown; and below it, in an oakleaf wreath (Eichenlaubkranz), the re-authorised Reichskokarde. On 29 September 1919 this Imperial cockade was definitively ordered replaced by a Republican version, with the black German eagle on an oval gilt background.

The field-grey M1919 field tunic (Feldrock) has both collar and cuffs faced with green 'badge cloth' – note the up-swept shape of the latter. It has two pleated patch breast pockets and two internal skirt pockets with slanted flaps; the eight front, four cuff, two pocket and two shoulder cord buttons are all of 19mm diameter and silver pebbled finish. The tunic now universally bore the former Guard's lace collar bars (Kragenspiegel), here of officer's quality, quill-embroidered, with two narrow 'lights' in arm-of-service colour. (General officers retained the Imperial-style collar patches for their ranks.) The oval shield showing the red arm-of-service colour and unit number is worn on both sleeves. Shoulder cords and sleeve rank stripes are in matt silver. This officer wears the new belt, which had an open frame one- or two-claw buckle, but others retained the old Imperial pattern.

The field-grey trousers (Stiefelhose) have three pockets, a slanted one in each side and a small flapped one at the front. As an artilleryman this officer has the choice of wearing leather leggings (Ledergamaschen) over the new M1919 black ankle boots; these leggings were very popular, although the infantry usually wore field-grey puttees fastened at the knee with a buckled strap.

Interesting photograph of the crew of an MG 08/15 light machine gun from the Bayerische Schützenkorps (XXI Brigade, Provisional Reichswehr), which is apparently composed entirely of decorated junior officers. No two are uniformed exactly alike – the group includes many possible combinations of tunics, belts, legwear and cap styles. Two wear the left sleeve badge of the 'former' FK von Epp; the officer second from right clearly shows the up-swept edge of the green cuff facing prescribed by the May 1919 regulations. The ammunition boxes are painted in the multi-coloured segmented camouflage scheme ordered for steel helmets in July 1918. (Bay.Armeemuseum)

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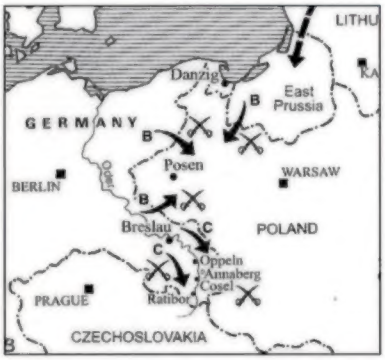

Maps

Photographs

The German Freikorps 1918–23

The troops returning home to Germany after the 1918 Armistice found their country riven by internal unrest, and its eastern borders threatened. Though reluctant to support the new Republic, the many Free Corps formed by ex-Imperial soldiers fought furiously against Communist revolutionaries at home and Polish and Bolshevik Russian pressure on the frontiers. Later providing much of the manpower for the new Reichswehr, the Free Corps would have strong links with the nascent Nazi Party. This concise account of a little-known but central episode in the history of 20th-century Germany is illustrated with rare photographs, and ten colour plates showing unprecedented details of uniforms and insignia.

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